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ROBERT ELSMERE BY MRS. HUMPHRY WARD.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. 2.

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1888. ·

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ROBERT ELSMERE.

BOOK II. (CONTINUED.)

SURREY.

CHAPTER XV.

"Now, having seen our sight," said Robert, as they left the great mass of Murewell behind them, "come and see our scandal. Both run by the same proprietor, if you please. There is a hamlet down there in the hollow"—and he pointed to a gray speck in the distance—"which deserves a Royal Commission all to itself, which is a *disgrace*"—and his tone warmed—"to any country, any owner, any agent! It is owned by Mr. Wendover, and I see the pleasing prospect straight before me of beginning my acquaintance with him by a fight over it. You will admit that it is a little hard on a man who wants to live on good terms with the possessor of the Murewell library to have to open relations with him by a fierce attack on his drains and his pigsties."

He turned to his companion with a half-rueful spark of laughter in his gray eyes. Langham hardly caught what he said. He was far away in meditations of his own.

"An attack," he repeated vaguely; "why an attack?"

Robert plunged again into the great topic of which his quick mind was evidently full. Langham tried to listen, but was conscious that his friend's social enthusiasms bored him a great deal. And side by side with the consciousness there slid in a little stinging reflection that four years ago no talk of Elsmere's could have bored him.

"What's the matter with this particular place?" he asked languidly, at last, raising his eyes towards the group of houses now beginning to emerge from the distance.

An angry red mounted in Robert's cheek.

"What isn't the matter with it? The houses, which were built on a swamp originally, are falling into ruin; the roofs, the drains, the accommodation per head, are all about equally scandalous. The place is harried with illness; since I came there has been both fever and diphtheria there. They are all crippled with rheumatism, but *that* they think nothing of; the English labourer takes rheumatism as quite in the day's bargain! And as to *vice*—the vice that comes of mere endless persecuting opportunity—I can tell you one's ideas of personal responsibility get a good deal shaken up by a place like this! And I can do nothing. I brought over Henslowe to see the place, and he behaved like a brute. He scoffed at all my complaints, said that no landlord would be such a fool as to build fresh cottages on such a site, that the old ones must just be allowed to go to ruin; that the people might live in them if they chose, or turn out of them if they chose. Nobody forced them to do either; it was their own look-out."

"That was true," said Langham, "wasn't it?"

Robert turned upon him fiercely.

"Ah! you think it so easy for those poor creatures to

leave their homes, their working places! Some of them have been there thirty years. They are close to the two or three farms that employ them, close to the osier beds which give them extra earnings in the spring. If they were turned out there is nothing nearer than Murewell, and not a single cottage to be found there. I don't say it is a landlord's duty to provide more cottages than are wanted; but if the labour is wanted, the labourer should be decently housed. He is worthy of his hire, and woe to the man who neglects or ill-treats him!"

Langham could not help smiling, partly at the vehemence of the speech, partly at the lack of adjustment between his friend's mood and his own. He braced himself to take the matter more seriously, but meanwhile Robert had caught the smile, and his angry eyes melted at once into laughter.

"There I am, ranting as usual," he said penitently. "Took you for Henslowe, I suppose! Ah, well, never mind. I hear the Provost has another book on the stocks."

So they diverged into other things, talking politics and new books, public men and what not, till, at the end of a long and gradual descent through wooded ground, some two miles to the north-west of the park, they emerged from the trees beneath which they had been walking, and found themselves on a bridge, a gray sluggish stream flowing beneath them, and the hamlet they sought rising among the river flats on the farther side.

"There," said Robert, stopping, "we are at our journey's end. Now then, what sort of a place of human habitation do you call *that*?"

The bridge whereon they stood crossed the main channel of the river, which just at that point, however, parted into several branches, and came meandering slowly

down through a little bottom or valley, filled with osier beds, long since robbed of their year's growth of shoots. On the other side of the river, on ground all but level with the osier beds which interposed between them and the stream, rose a miserable group of houses, huddled together as though their bulging walls and rotten roofs could only maintain themselves at all by the help and support which each wretched hovel gave to its neighbour. The mud walls were stained with yellow patches of lichen, the palings round the little gardens were broken and ruinous. Close beside them all was a sort of open drain or water-course, stagnant and noisome, which dribbled into the river a little above the bridge. Behind them rose a high gravel bank edged by firs, and a line of oak trees against the sky. The houses stood in the shadow of the bank looking north, and on this gray, lowering day, the dreariness, the gloom, the squalor of the place were indescribable.

"Well, that *is* a God-forsaken hole!" said Langham, studying it, his interest roused at last, rather, perhaps, by the Ruysdael-like melancholy and picturesqueness of the scene than by its human suggestiveness. "I could hardly have imagined such a place existed in southern England. It is more like a bit of Ireland."

"If it were Ireland it might be to somebody's interest to ferret it out," said Robert bitterly. "But these poor folks are out of the world. They may be brutalised with impunity. Oh, such a case as I had here last autumn! A young girl of sixteen or seventeen, who would have been healthy and happy anywhere else, stricken by the damp and the poison of the place, dying in six weeks, of complications due to nothing in the world but preventable cruelty and neglect! It was a sight

that burnt into my mind, once for all, what is meant by a landlord's responsibility. I tried, of course, to move her, but neither she nor her parents—elderly folk—had energy enough for a change. They only prayed to be let alone. I came over the last evening of her life to give her the communion. 'Ah, sir!' said the mother to me—not bitterly—that is the strange thing, they have so little bitterness—'if Mister 'Enslowe would jest 'a mended that bit 'o roof of ours last winter, Bessie needn't have laid in the wet so many nights as she did, and she coughin' fit to break your heart, for all the things yer could put over 'er.'"

Robert paused, his strong young face, so vehemently angry a few minutes before, tremulous with feeling. "Ah, well," he said at last with a long breath, moving away from the parapet of the bridge on which he had been leaning, "better be oppressed than oppressor, any day! Now, then, I must deliver my stores. There's a child here Catherine and I have been doing our best to pull through typhoid."

They crossed the bridge and turned down the track leading to the hamlet. Some planks carried them across the ditch, the main sewer of the community, as Robert pointed out, and they made their way through the filth surrounding one of the nearest cottages.

A feeble elderly man, whose shaking limbs and sallow bloodless skin made him look much older than he actually was, opened the door and invited them to come in. Robert passed on into an inner room, conducted thither by a woman who had been sitting working over the fire. Langham stood irresolute; but the old man's quavering "kindly take a chair, sir; you've come a long way," decided him, and he stepped in.

Inside the hovel was miserable indeed. It belonged to that old and evil type which the efforts of the last twenty years have done so much all over England to sweep away: four mud walls, enclosing an oblong space about eight yards long, divided into two unequal portions by a lath and plaster partition, with no upper storey, a thatched roof, now entirely out of repair, and letting in the rain in several places, and a paved floor little better than the earth itself, so large and cavernous were the gaps between the stones. The dismal place had no small adornings—none of those little superfluities which, however ugly and trivial, are still so precious in the dwellings of the poor, as showing the existence of some instinct or passion which is not the creation of the sheerest physical need; and Langham, as he sat down caught the sickening marsh smell which the Oxford man, accustomed to the odours of damp meadows in times of ebbing flood and festering sun, knows so well. As old Milsom began to talk to him in his weak tremulous voice, the visitor's attention was irresistibly held by the details about him. Fresh as he was from all the delicate sights, the harmonious colours and delightful forms of the squire's house, they made an unusually sharp impression on his fastidious senses. What does human life become lived on reeking floors and under stifling roofs like these? What strange abnormal deteriorations, physical and spiritual, must it not inevitably undergo? Langham felt a sudden inward movement of disgust and repulsion. "For heaven's sake, keep your superstitions!" he could have cried to the whole human race, "or any other narcotic that a grinding fate has left you. What does *anything* matter to the mass of mankind but a little ease, a little lightening of pressure on this side or on that?"

Meanwhile the old man went maundering on, talking of the weather, and of his sick child, and "Mr. Elsmere," with a kind of listless incoherence which hardly demanded an answer, though Langham threw in a word or two here and there.

Among other things, he began to ask a question or two about Robert's predecessor, a certain Mr. Preston, who had left behind him a memory of amiable evangelical indolence.

"Did you see much of him?" he asked.

"Oh law, no, sir!" replied the man, surprised into something like energy. "Never seed 'im more 'n once a year, and sometimes not that!"

"Was he liked here?"

"Well, sir, it was like this, you see. My wife, she's north-country, she is, comes from Yorkshire; sometimes she'd used to say to me, 'Passon 'ee ain't much good, and passon 'ee ain't much harm. 'Ee's no more good nor more 'arm, so fer as *I* can see, nor a chip in a basin o' parritch.' And that was just about it, sir," said the old man, pleased for the hundredth time with his wife's bygone flight of metaphor and his own exact memory of it.

As to the rector's tendance of his child, his tone was very cool and guarded.

"It do seem strange, sir, as nor he nor Doctor Grimes 'ull let her have anything to put a bit of flesh on her, nothin' but them messy things as he brings—milk an' that. An' the beef jelly—lor, such a trouble! Missis Elsmere, he tells my wife, strains all the stuff through a cloth, she do; never seed anythin' like it, nor my wife neither. People is clever nowadays," said the speaker dubiously. Langham realised that, in this quarter of his parish at any rate, his friend's pastoral vanity, if he had

any, would not find much to feed on. Nothing, to judge from this specimen at least, greatly affected an inhabitant of Mile End. Gratitude, responsiveness, imply health and energy, past or present. The only constant defence which the poor have against such physical conditions as those which prevailed at Mile End is apathy.

As they came down the dilapidated steps at the cottage door, Robert drew in with avidity a long draught of the outer air.

"Ugh!" he said with a sort of groan, "that bedroom! Nothing gives one such a sense of the toughness of human life as to see a child recovering, actually recovering, in such a pestilential den! Father, mother, grown-up son, girl of thirteen, and grandchild, all huddled in a space just fourteen feet square. Langham!" and he turned passionately on his companion, "what defence can be found for a man who lives in a place like Murewell Hall, and can take money from human beings for the use of a sty like that?"

"Gently, my friend. Probably the squire, being the sort of recluse he is, has never seen the place, or, at any rate, not for years, and knows nothing about it!"

"More shame for him!"

"True in a sense," said Langham, a little drily; "but as you *may* want hereafter to make excuses for your man, and he *may* give you occasion, I wouldn't begin by painting him to yourself any blacker than need be."

Robert laughed, sighed and acquiesced. "I am a hot-headed, impatient kind of creature at the best of times," he confessed. "They tell me that great things have been done for the poor round here in the last twenty years. Something has been done, certainly. But why are the old ways, the old evil neglect and apathy,

so long, so terribly long in dying? This social progress of ours we are so proud of is a clumsy limping jade at best!"

They prowled a little more about the hamlet, every step almost revealing some new source of poison and disease. Of their various visits, however, Langham remembered nothing afterwards but a little scene in a miserable cottage, where they found a whole family party gathered round the mid-day meal. A band of puny, black, black-eyed children were standing or sitting at the table. The wife, confined of twins three weeks before, sat by the fire, deathly pale, a "bad leg" stretched out before her on some improvised support, one baby on her lap and another dark-haired bundle asleep in a cradle beside her. There was a pathetic pinched beauty about the whole family. Even the tiny twins were comparatively shapely; all the other children had delicate transparent skins, large eyes, and small colourless mouths. The father, a picturesque handsome fellow, looking as though he had gipsy blood in his veins, had opened the door to their knock. Robert, seeing the meal, would have retreated at once, in spite of the children's shy inviting looks, but a glance past them at the mother's face checked the word of refusal and apology on his lips, and he stepped in.

In after years Langham was always apt to see him in imagination as he saw him then, standing beside the bent figure of the mother, his quick pitiful eyes taking in the pallor and exhaustion of face and frame, his hand resting instinctively on the head of a small creature that had crept up beside him, his look all attention and softness as the woman feebly told him some of the main facts of her state. The young rector at the moment

might have stood for the modern "Man of Feeling," as sensitive, as impressionable, and as free from the burden of self, as his eighteenth-century prototype.

On the way home Robert suddenly remarked to his companion, "Have you heard my sister-in-law play yet, Langham? What did you think of it?"

"Extraordinary!" said Langham briefly. "The most considerable gift I ever came across in an amateur."

His olive cheek flushed a little involuntarily. Robert threw a quick observant look at him.

"The difficulty," he exclaimed, "is to know what to do with it!"

"Why do you make the difficulty? I gather she wants to study abroad. What is there to prevent it?"

Langham turned to his companion with a touch of asperity. He could not stand it that Elsmere should be so much narrowed and warped by that wife of his, and her prejudices. Why should that gifted creature be cribbed, cabined, and confined in this way?

"I grant you," said Robert, with a look of perplexity, "there is not much to prevent it."

And he was silent a moment, thinking, on his side, very tenderly of all the antecedents and explanations of that old-world distrust of art and the artistic life so deeply rooted in his wife, even though in practice and under his influence she had made concession after concession.

"The great solution of all," he said presently, brightening, "would be to get her married. I don't wonder her belongings dislike the notion of anything so pretty and so flighty going off to live by itself. And to break up the home in Whindale would be to undo everything their father did for them, to defy his most solemn last wishes."

"To talk of a father's wishes, in a case of this kind, ten years after his death, is surely excessive?" said Langham with dry interrogation; then, suddenly recollecting himself, "I beg your pardon, Elsmere. I am interfering."

"Nonsense," said Robert brightly, "I don't wonder, it seems like a difficulty of our own making. Like so many difficulties, it depends on character, present character, bygone character ——" And again he fell musing on his Westmoreland experiences, and on the intensity of that Puritan type it had revealed to him. "However, as I said, marriage would be the natural way out of it."

"An easy way, I should think," said Langham, after a pause.

"It won't be so easy to find the right man. She is a young person with a future, is Miss Rose. She wants somebody in the stream; somebody with a strong hand who will keep her in order and yet give her a wide range; a rich man, I think—she hasn't the ways of a poor man's wife; but, at any rate, some one who will be proud of her, and yet have a full life of his own in which she may share."

"Your views are extremely clear," said Langham, and his smile had a touch of bitterness in it. "If hers agree, I prophesy you won't have long to wait. She has beauty, talent, charm—everything that rich and important men like."

There was the slightest sarcastic note in the voice. Robert winced. It was borne in upon one of the least worldly of mortals that he had been talking like the veriest schemer. What vague quick impulse had driven him on?

By the time they emerged again upon the Murewell

Green the rain had cleared altogether away, and the autumnal morning had broken into sunshine, which played mistily on the sleeping woods, on the white fronts of the cottages, and the wide green where the rain-pools glistened. On the hill leading to the rectory there was the flutter of a woman's dress. As they hurried on afraid of being late for luncheon, they saw that it was Rose in front of them.

Langham started as the slender figure suddenly defined itself against the road. A tumult within, half rage, half feeling, showed itself only in an added rigidity of the finely-cut features.

Rose turned directly she heard the steps and voices, and over the dreaminess of her face there flashed a sudden brightness.

"You *have* been a long time!" she exclaimed, saying the first thing that came into her head, joyously, rashly, like the child she in reality was. "How many halt and maimed has Robert taken you to see, Mr. Langham?"

"We went to Murewell first. The library was well worth seeing. Since then we have been a parish round, distributing stores."

Rose's look changed in an instant. The words were spoken by the Langham of her earliest acquaintance. The man who that morning had asked her to play to him had gone—vanished away.

"How exhilarating!" she said scornfully. "Don't you wonder how any one can ever tear themselves away from the country?"

"Rose, don't be abusive," said Robert, opening his eyes at her tone. Then, passing his arm through hers, he looked banteringly down upon her. "For the first time since you left the metropolis you have walked your-

self into a colour. It's becoming—and it's Murewell—so be civil!”

“Oh, nobody denies you a high place in milkmaids!” she said, with her head in air—and they went off into a minute's sparring.

Meanwhile Langham, on the other side of the road, walked up slowly, his eyes on the ground. Once, when Rose's eye caught him, a shock ran through her. There was already a look of slovenly age about his stooping bookworm's gait. Her companion of the night before—handsome, animated, human—where was he? The girl's heart felt a singular contraction. Then she turned and rent herself, and Robert found her more mocking and sprightly than ever.

At the rectory gate Robert ran on to overtake a farmer on the road. Rose stooped to open the latch; Langham mechanically made a quick movement forward to anticipate her. Their fingers touched; she drew hers hastily away and passed in, an erect and dignified figure, in her curving garden hat.

Langham went straight up to his room, shut the door, and stood before the open window, deaf and blind to everything save an inward storm of sensation.

“Fool! Idiot!” he said to himself at last, with fierce stifled emphasis, while a kind of dumb fury with himself and circumstance swept through him.

That he, the poor and solitary student whose only sources of self-respect lay in the deliberate limitations, the reasoned and reasonable renunciations he had imposed upon his life, should have needed the reminder of his old pupil not to fall in love with his brilliant ambitious sister! His irritable self-consciousness enormously magnified Elsmere's motive and Elsmere's words. That

golden vagueness and softness of temper which had possessed him since his last sight of her gave place to one of bitter tension.

With sardonic scorn he pointed out to himself that his imagination was still held by, his nerves were still thrilling under, the mental image of a girl looking up to him as no woman had ever looked—a girl, white-armed, white-necked—with softened eyes of appeal and confidence. He bade himself mark that during the whole of his morning walk with Robert down to its last stage, his mind had been really absorbed in some preposterous dream he was now too self-contemptuous to analyse. Pretty well for a philosopher, in four days! What a ridiculous business is life—what a contemptible creature is man, how incapable of dignity, of consistency!

At luncheon he talked rather more than usual, especially on literary matters with Robert. Rose, too, was fully occupied in giving Catherine a sarcastic account of a singing lesson she had been administering in the school that morning. Catherine winced sometimes at the tone of it.

That afternoon Robert, in high spirits, his rod over his shoulder, his basket at his back, carried off his guest for a lounging afternoon along the river. Elsmere enjoyed these fishing expeditions like a boy. They were his holidays, relished all the more because he kept a jealous account of them with his conscience. He sauntered along, now throwing a cunning and effectual fly, now resting, smoking, and chattering, as the fancy took him. He found a great deal of the old stimulus and piquancy in Langham's society, but there was an occasional irritability in his companion, especially towards himself personally, which puzzled him. After a while,

indeed, he began to feel himself the unreasonably cheerful person which he evidently appeared to his companion. A mere ignorant enthusiast, banished for ever from the realm of pure knowledge by certain original and incorrigible defects—after a few hours' talk with Langham Robert's quick insight always showed him some image of himself resembling this in his friend's mind.

At last he turned restive. He had been describing to Langham his acquaintance with the Dissenting minister of the place—a strong coarse-grained fellow of sensuous excitable temperament, famous for his noisy “conversion meetings,” and for a gymnastic dexterity in the quoting and combining of texts, unrivalled in Robert's experience. Some remark on the Dissenter's logic, made, perhaps, a little too much in the tone of the Churchman conscious of University advantages, seemed to irritate Langham.

“You think your Anglican logic in dealing with the Bible so superior! On the contrary, I am all for your Ranter. He is your logical Protestant. Historically, you Anglican parsons are where you are and what you are, because Englishmen, as a whole, like attempting the contradictory—like, above all, to eat their cake and have it. The nation has made you and maintains you for its own purposes. But that is another matter.”

Robert smoked on a moment in silence. Then he flushed and laid down his pipe.

“We are all fools in your eyes, I know! *A la bonne heure!* I have been to the University, and talk what he is pleased to call ‘philosophy’—therefore Mr. Colson denies me faith. You have always, in your heart of hearts, denied me knowledge. But I cling to both in spite of you.”

There was a ray of defiance, of emotion, in his look. Langham met it in silence.

"I deny you nothing," he said at last, slowly. "On the contrary, I believe you to be the possessor of all that is best worth having in life and mind."

His irritation had all died away. His tone was one of indescribable depression, and his great black eyes were fixed on Robert with a melancholy which startled his companion. By a subtle transition Elsmere felt himself touched with a pang of profound pity for the man who an instant before had seemed to pose as his scornful superior. He stretched out his hand, and laid it on his friend's shoulder.

Rose spent the afternoon in helping Catherine with various parochial occupations. In the course of them Catherine asked many questions about Long Whindale. Her thoughts clung to the hills, to the gray farmhouses, the rough men and women inside them. But Rose gave her small satisfaction.

"Poor old Jim Backhouse!" said Catherine, sighing. "Agnes tells me he is quite bedridden now."

"Well, and a good thing for John, don't you think," said Rose briskly, covering a parish library book the while in a way which made Catherine's fingers itch to take it from her, "and for us? It's some use having a carrier now."

Catherine made no reply. She thought of the "noodle" fading out of life in the room where Mary Backhouse died; she actually saw the white hair, the blurred eyes, the palsied hands, the poor emaciated limbs stretched along the settle. Her heart rose, but she said nothing.

"And has Mrs. Thornburgh been enjoying her summer?"

"Oh! I suppose so," said Rose, her tone indicating a quite measureless indifference. "She had another young Oxford man staying with her in June—a missionary—and it annoyed her very much that neither Agnes nor I would intervene to prevent his resuming his profession. She seemed to think it was a question of saving him from being eaten, and apparently he would have proposed to either of us."

Catherine could not help laughing. "I suppose she still thinks she married Robert and me."

"Of course. So she did."

Catherine coloured a little, but Rose's hard lightness of tone was unconquerable.

"Or if she didn't," Rose resumed, "nobody could have the heart to rob her of the illusion. Oh, by the way, Sarah has been under warning since June! Mrs. Thornburgh told her desperately that she must either throw over her young man, who was picked up drunk at the vicarage gate one night, or vacate the vicarage kitchen. Sarah cheerfully accepted her month's notice, and is still making the vicarage jams and walking out with the young man every Sunday. Mrs. Thornburgh sees that it will require a convulsion of nature to get rid either of Sarah or the young man, and has succumbed."

"And the Tysons? And that poor Walker girl?"

"Oh, dear me, Catherine!" said Rose, a strange disproportionate flash of impatience breaking through. "Every one in Long Whindale is always just where and what they were last year. I admit they are born and die, but they do nothing else of a decisive kind."

Catherine's hands worked away for a while, then she

laid down her book and said, lifting her clear large eyes on her sister,—

“Was there *never* a time when you loved the valley, Rose?”

“Never!” cried Rose.

Then she pushed away her work, and leaning her elbows on the table turned her brilliant face to Catherine. There was frank mutiny in it.

“By the way, Catherine, are you going to prevent mamma from letting me go to Berlin for the winter?”

“And after Berlin, Rose?” said Catherine, presently, her gaze bent upon her work.

“After Berlin? What next?” said Rose recklessly. “Well, after Berlin I shall try to persuade mamma and Agnes, I suppose, to come and back me up in London. We could still be some months of the year at Burwood.”

Now she had said it out. But there was something else surely goading the girl than mere intolerance of the family tradition. The hesitancy, the moral doubt of her conversation with Langham, seemed to have vanished wholly in a kind of acrid self-assertion.

Catherine felt a shock sweep through her. It was as though all the pieties of life, all the sacred assumptions and self-surrenders at the root of it, were shaken, outraged by the girl's tone.

“Do you ever remember,” she said, looking up, while her voice trembled, “what papa wished when he was dying?”

It was her last argument. To Rose she had very seldom used it in so many words. Probably, it seemed to her too strong, too sacred, to be often handled.

But Rose sprang up, and pacing the little workroom with her white wrists locked behind her, she met that

argument with all the concentrated passion which her youth had for years been storing up against it. Catherine sat presently overwhelmed, bewildered. This language of a proud and tameless individuality, this modern gospel of the divine right of self-development—her soul loathed it! And yet, since that night in Marrisdale, there had been a new yearning in her to understand.

Suddenly, however, Rose stopped, lost her thread. Two figures were crossing the lawn, and their shadows were thrown far beyond them by the fast disappearing sun.

She threw herself down on her chair again with an abrupt—

“Do you see they have come back? We must go and dress.”

And as she spoke she was conscious of a new sensation altogether—the sensation of the wild creature lassoed on the prairie, of the bird exchanging in an instant its glorious freedom of flight for the pitiless meshes of the net. It was stifling—her whole nature seemed to fight with it.

Catherine rose and began to put away the books they had been covering. She had said almost nothing in answer to Rose's tirade. When she was ready she came and stood beside her sister a moment, her lips trembling. At last she stooped and kissed the girl—the kiss of deep suppressed feeling—and went away. Rose made no response.

Unmusical as she was, Catherine pined for her sister's music that evening. Robert was busy in his study, and the hours seemed interminable. After a little difficult talk Langham subsided into a book and a corner. But the only words of which he was conscious for long were the words of an inner dialogue. “I promised to play for

her.—Go and offer then!—Madness! let me keep away from her. If she asks me, of course I will go. She is much too proud, and already she thinks me guilty of a rudeness.”

Then, with a shrug, he would fall to his book again, abominably conscious, however, all the while of the white figure between the lamp and the open window, and of the delicate head and cheek lit up against the trees and the soft August dark.

When the time came to go to bed he got their candles for the two ladies. Rose just touched his hand with cool fingers.

“Good-night, Mr. Langham. You are going in to smoke with Robert, I suppose?”

Her bright eyes seemed to look him through. Their mocking hostility seemed to say to him as plainly as possible: “Your purgatory is over—go, smoke and be happy!”

“I will go and help him wind up his sermon,” he said, with an attempt at a laugh, and moved away.

Rose went upstairs, and it seemed to her that a Greek brow, and a pair of wavering melancholy eyes, went before her in the darkness chased along the passages by the light she held. She gained her room, and stood by the window, seized again by that stifling sense of catastrophe, so strange, so undefined. Then she shook it off with an angry laugh, and went to work to see how far her stock of light dresses had suffered by her London dissipations.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE next morning after breakfast the rectory party were in the garden—the gentlemen smoking, Catherine and her sister strolling arm-in-arm among the flowers. Catherine's vague terrors of the morning before had all taken to themselves wings. It seemed to her that Rose and Mr. Langham had hardly spoken to each other since she had seen them walking about together. Robert had already made merry over his own alarms, and hers, and she admitted he was in the right. As to her talk with Rose her deep meditative nature was slowly working upon and digesting it. Meanwhile, she was all tenderness to her sister, and there was even a reaction of pity in her heart towards the lonely sceptic who had once been so good to Robert.

Robert was just bethinking himself that it was time to go off to the school, when they were all startled by an unexpected visitor—a short old lady, in a rusty black dress and bonnet, who entered the drive and stood staring at the rectory party, a tiny hand in a black thread glove shading the sun from a pair of wrinkled eyes.

"Mrs. Darcy!" exclaimed Robert to his wife after a moment's perplexity, and they walked quickly to meet her.

Rose and Langham exchanged a few commonplaces till the others joined them, and then for a while the attention of everybody in the group was held by the squire's sister. She was very small, as thin and light as thistle-down, ill-dressed, and as communicative as a babbling child. The face and all the features were extraordinarily minute, and moreover, blanched and etherealised by age. She had the elfish look of a little withered fairy

godmother. And yet through it all it was clear that she was a great lady. There were certain poses and gestures about her, which made her thread gloves and rusty skirts seem a mere whim and masquerade, adopted, perhaps deliberately, from a high-bred love of congruity, to suit the country lanes.

She had come to ask them all to dinner at the Hall on the following evening, and she either brought or devised on the spot the politest messages from the squire to the new rector, which pleased the sensitive Robert and silenced for the moment his various misgivings as to Mr. Wendover's advent. Then she stayed chattering, studying Rose every now and then out of her strange little eyes, restless and glancing as a bird's, which took stock also of the garden, of the flower-beds, of Elsmere's lanky frame, and of Elsmere's handsome friend in the background. She was most odd when she was grateful, and she was grateful for the most unexpected things. She thanked Elsmere effusively for coming to live there, "sacrificing yourself so nobly to us country folk," and she thanked him with an appreciative glance at Langham, for having his clever friends to stay with him. "The squire will be so pleased. My brother, you know, is very clever; oh yes, frightfully clever!"

And then there was a long sigh, at which Elsmere could hardly keep his countenance.

She thought it particularly considerate of them to have been to see the squire's books. It would make conversation so easy when they came to dinner.

"Though I don't know anything about his books. He doesn't like women to talk about books. He says they only pretend—even the clever ones. Except, of course, Madame de Staël. He can only say she was ugly, and

I don't deny it. But I have about used up Madame de Staël," she added, dropping into another sigh as soft and light as a child's.

Robert was charmed with her, and even Langham smiled. And as Mrs. Darcy adored "clever men," ranking them, as the London of her youth had ranked them, only second to "persons of birth," she stood among them beaming, becoming more and more whimsical and inconsequent, more and more deliciously incalculable, as she expanded. At last she fluttered off, only, however, to come hurrying back, with little, short, scudding steps, to implore them all to come to tea with her as soon as possible in the garden that was her special hobby, and in her last new summer-house.

"I build two or three every summer," she said. "Now, there are twenty-one! Roger laughs at me," and there was a momentary bitterness in the little eerie face, "but how can one live without hobbies? That's one—then I've two more. My album—oh, you *will* all write in my album, won't you? When I was young—when I was Maid of Honour"—and she drew herself up slightly—"everybody had albums. Even the dear Queen herself! I remember how she made M. Guizot write in it; something quite stupid, after all. *Those* hobbies—the garden and the album—are *quite* harmless, aren't they? They hurt nobody, do they?" Her voice dropped a little, with a pathetic expostulating intonation in it, as of one accustomed to be rebuked.

"Let me remind you of a saying of Bacon's," said Langham, studying her, and softened perforce into benevolence.

"Yes, yes," said Mrs. Darcy in a flutter of curiosity.

"God Almighty first planted a garden," he quoted; "and indeed, it is the purest of all human pleasures."

"Oh, but how *delightful!*" cried Mrs. Darcy, clasping her diminutive hands in their thread gloves. "You must write that in my album, Mr. Langham, that very sentence; oh, how *clever* of you to remember it! What it is to be clever and have a brain! But, then—I've another hobby——"

Here, however, she stopped, hung her head and looked depressed. Robert, with a little ripple of laughter, begged her to explain.

"No," she said plaintively, giving a quick uneasy look at him, as though it occurred to her that it might some day be his pastoral duty to admonish her. "No, it's wrong. I know it is—only I can't help it. Never mind. You'll know soon."

And again she turned away, when, suddenly, Rose attracted her attention, and she stretched out a thin white bird-claw of a hand and caught the girl's arm.

"There won't be much to amuse you to-morrow, my dear, and there ought to be—you're so pretty!" Rose blushed furiously and tried to draw her hand away. "No, no! don't mind, don't mind. I didn't at your age. Well, we'll do our best. But your own party is so *charming!*" and she looked round the little circle, her gaze stopping specially at Langham before it returned to Rose. "After all, you will amuse each other."

Was there any malice in the tiny withered creature? Rose, unsympathetic and indifferent as youth commonly is when its own affairs absorb it, had stood coldly outside the group which was making much of the squire's sister. Was it so the strange little visitor revenged herself?

At any rate Rose was left feeling as if some one had

pricked her. While Catherine and Elsmere escorted Mrs. Darcy to the gate she turned to go in, her head thrown back stag-like, her cheek still burning. Why should it be always open to the old to annoy the young with impunity?

Langham watched her mount the first step or two; his eye travelled up the slim figure so instinct with pride and will—and something in him suddenly gave way. It was like a man who feels his grip relaxing on some attacking thing he has been holding by the throat.

He followed her hastily.

“Must you go in? And none of us have paid our respects yet to those phloxes in the back garden?”

Oh woman—flighty woman! An instant before, the girl, sore and bruised in every fibre, she only half knew why, was thirsting that this man might somehow offer her his neck that she might trample on it. He offers it, and the angry instinct wavers, as a man wavers in a wrestling match when his opponent unexpectedly gives ground. She paused, she turned her white throat. His eyes upturned met hers.

“The phloxes did you say?” she asked, coolly re-descending the steps. “Then round here, please.”

She led the way, he followed, conscious of an utter relaxation of nerve and will which for the moment had something intoxicating in it.

“There are your phloxes,” she said, stopping before a splendid line of plants in full blossom. Her self-respect was whole again; her spirits rose at a bound. “I don’t know why you admire them so much. They have no scent, and they are only pretty in the lump,” and she broke off a spike of blossom, studied it a little disdainfully, and threw it away.

He stood beside her, the southern glow and life of

which it was intermittently capable once more lighting up the strange face.

"Give me leave to enjoy everything countrified more than usual," he said. "After this morning it will be so long before I see the true country again."

He looked, smiling, round on the blue and white brilliance of the sky, clear again after a night of rain; on the sloping garden, on the village beyond, on the hedge of sweet peas close beside them, with its blooms

"On tiptoe for a flight,
With wings of gentle flush o'er delicate white."

"Oh! Oxford is countrified enough," she said indifferently, moving down the broad grass-path which divided the garden into two equal portions.

"But I am leaving Oxford, at any rate for a year," he said quietly. "I am going to London."

Her delicate eyebrows went up. "To London?" Then, in a tone of mock meekness and sympathy, "How you will dislike it!"

"Dislike it—why?"

"Oh! because—" she hesitated, and then laughed her daring girlish laugh—"because there are so many stupid people in London; the clever people are not all picked out like prize apples, as I suppose they are in Oxford."

"At Oxford?" repeated Langham, with a kind of groan. "At Oxford? You imagine that Oxford is inhabited only by clever people?"

"I can only judge by what I see," she said demurely. "Every Oxford man always behaves as if he were the cream of the universe. Oh! I don't mean to be rude," she cried, losing for a moment her defiant control over herself, as though afraid of having gone too far. "I am

not the least disrespectful, really. When you and Robert talk, Catherine and I feel quite as humble as we ought."

The words were hardly out before she could have bitten the tongue that spoke them. He had made her feel her indiscretions of Sunday night as she deserved to feel them, and now after three minutes' conversation she was on the verge of fresh ones. Would she never grow up, never behave like other girls? That word *humble*! It seemed to burn her memory.

Before he could possibly answer she barred the way by a question as short and dry as possible—

"What are you going to London for?"

"For many reasons," he said, shrugging his shoulders. "I have told no one yet—not even Elsmere. And indeed I go back to my rooms far a while from here. But as soon as Term begins I become a Londoner."

They had reached the gate at the bottom of the garden, and were leaning against it. She was disturbed, conscious, lightly flushed. It struck her as another *gaucherie* on her part that she should have questioned him as to his plans. What did his life matter to her?

He was looking away from her, studying the half-ruined, degraded manor house spread out below them. Then suddenly he turned—

"If I could imagine for a moment it would interest you to hear my reasons for leaving Oxford, I could not flatter myself you would see any sense in them. I *know* that Robert will think them moonshine; nay, more, that they will give him pain."

He smiled sadly. The tone of gentleness, the sudden breach in the man's melancholy reserve affected the girl beside him for the second time, precisely as they had affected her the first time. The result of twenty-four

hours' resentful meditation turned out to be precisely *nil*. Her breath came fast, her proud look melted, and his quick sense caught the change in an instant.

"Are you tired of Oxford?" the poor child asked him, almost shyly.

"Mortally!" he said, still smiling. "And what is more important still, Oxford is tired of me. I have been lecturing there for ten years. They have had more than enough of me."

"Oh! but Robert said——" began Rose impetuously, then stopped, crimson, remembering many things Robert had said.

"That I helped him over a few stiles?" returned Langham calmly. "Yes, there was a time when I was capable of that—there was a time when I could teach, and teach with pleasure." He paused. Rose could have scourged herself for the tremor she felt creeping over her. Why should it be to her so new and strange a thing that *a man*, especially a man of these years and this calibre, should confide in her, should speak to her intimately of himself? After all, she said to herself angrily, with a terrified sense of importance, she was a child no longer, though her mother and sisters would treat her as one. "When we were chatting the other night," he went on, turning to her again as he stood leaning on the gate, "do you know what it was struck me most?"

His tone had in it the most delicate, the most friendly deference. But Rose flushed furiously.

"That girls are very ready to talk about themselves, I imagine," she said scornfully.

"Not at all! Not for a moment! No, but it seemed to me so pathetic, so strange that anybody should wish for anything so much as you wished for the musician's life."

"And you never wish for anything?" she cried.

"When Elsmere was at college," he said, smiling, "I believe I wished he should get a first class. This year I have certainly wished to say good-bye to St. Anselm's, and to turn my back for good and all on my men. I can't remember that I have wished for anything else for six years."

She looked at him perplexed. Was his manner merely languid, or was it from him that the emotion she felt invading herself first started? She tried to shake it off.

"And *I* am just a bundle of wants," she said, half-mockingly. "Generally speaking I am in the condition of being ready to barter all I have for some folly or other—one in the morning, another in the afternoon. What have you to say to such people, Mr. Langham?"

Her eyes challenged him magnificently, mostly out of sheer nervousness. But the face they rested on seemed suddenly to turn to stone before her. The life died out of it. It grew still and rigid.

"Nothing," he said quietly. "Between them and me there is a great gulf fixed. I watch them pass, and I say to myself: 'There are *the living*—that is how they look, how they speak! Realise once for all that you have nothing to do with them. Life is theirs—belongs to *them*. You are already outside it. Go your way, and be a spectre among the active and the happy no longer.'"

He leant his back against the gate. Did he see her? Was he conscious of her at all in this rare impulse of speech which had suddenly overtaken one of the most withdrawn and silent of human beings? All her airs dropped off her; a kind of fright seized her; and involuntarily she laid her hand on his arm.

"Don't—don't—Mr. Langham! Oh, don't say such

things! Why should you be so unhappy? Why should you talk so? Can no one do anything? Why do you live so much alone? Is there no one you care about?"

He turned. What a vision! His artistic sense absorbed it in an instant—the beautiful tremulous lip, the drawn white brow. For a moment he drank in the pity, the emotion, of those eyes. Then a movement of such self-scorn as even he had never felt swept through him. He gently moved away; her hand dropped.

"Miss Leyburn," he said, gazing at her, his olive face singularly pale, "don't waste your pity on me, for Heaven's sake. Some madness made me behave as I did just now. Years ago the same sort of idiocy betrayed me to your brother; never before or since. I ask your pardon, humbly," and his tone seemed to scorch her, "that this second fit of ranting should have seized me in your presence."

But he could not keep it up. The inner upheaval had gone too far. He stopped and looked at her—piteously, the features quivering. It was as though the man's whole nature had for the moment broken up, become disorganised. She could not bear it. Some ghastly infirmity seemed to have been laid bare to her. She held out both her hands. Swiftly he caught them, stooped, kissed them, let them go. It was an extraordinary scene—to both a kind of lifetime.

Then he gathered himself together by a mighty effort.

"That was *adorable* of you," he said with a long breath. "But I stole it—I despise myself. Why should you pity me? What is there to pity me for? My troubles, such as I have, are my own making—every one."

And he laid a sort of vindictive emphasis on the words. The tears of excitement were in her eyes.

"Won't you let me be your friend?" she said, trem-

bling, with a kind of reproach. "I thought—the other night—we were to be friends. Won't you tell me——"

"More of yourself?" her eyes said, but her voice failed her. And as for him, as he gazed at her, all the accidents of circumstance, of individual character, seemed to drop from her. He forgot the difference of years; he saw her no longer as she was—a girl hardly out of the schoolroom, vain, ambitious, dangerously responsive, on whose crude romantic sense he was wantonly playing; she was to him pure beauty, pure woman. For one tumultuous moment the cold critical instinct which had been for years draining his life of all its natural energies was powerless. It was sweet to yield, to speak, as it had never been sweet before.

So, leaning over the gate, he told her the story of his life, of his cramped childhood and youth, of his brief moment of happiness and success at college, of his first attempts to make himself a power among younger men, of the gradual dismal failure of all his efforts, the dying down of desire and ambition. From the general narrative there stood out little pictures of individual persons or scenes, clear cut and masterly—of his father, the Gainsborough churchwarden; of his Methodistical mother, who had all her life lamented her own beauty as a special snare of Satan, and who since her husband's death had refused to see her son on the ground that his opinions "had vexed his father"; of his first ardent worship of knowledge, and passion to communicate it; and of the first intuitions in lecture, face to face with an undergraduate, alone in college rooms, sometimes alone on Alpine heights, of something cold, impotent and baffling in himself, which was to stand for ever between him and action, between him and human affection; the growth of

the critical pessimist sense which laid the axe to the root of enthusiasm after enthusiasm, friendship after friendship—which made other men feel him inhuman, intangible, a skeleton at the feast; and the persistence through it all of a kind of hunger for life and its satisfactions, which the will was more and more powerless to satisfy: all these Langham put into words with an extraordinary magic and delicacy of phrase. There was something in him which found a kind of pleasure in the long analysis, which took pains that it should be infinitely well done.

Rose followed him breathlessly. If she had known more of literature she would have realised that she was witnessing a masterly dissection of one of those many morbid growths of which our nineteenth century psychology is full. But she was anything but literary, and she could not analyse her excitement. The man's physical charm, his melancholy, the intensity of what he said, affected, unsteadied her as music was apt to affect her. And through it all there was the strange girlish pride that this should have befallen *her*; a first crude intoxicating sense of the power over human lives which was to be hers, mingled with a desperate anxiety to be equal to the occasion, to play her part well.

"So you see," said Langham at last, with a great effort (to do him justice) to climb back on to some ordinary level of conversation; "all these transcendentalisms apart, I am about the most unfit man in the world for a college tutor. The undergraduates regard me as a shilly-shallying pedant. On my part," he added drily, "I am not slow to retaliate. Every term I live I find the young man a less interesting animal. I regard the whole university system as a wretched sham. Know-

ledge! It has no more to do with knowledge than my boots."

And for one curious instant he looked out over the village, his fastidious scholar's soul absorbed by some intellectual irritation, of which Rose understood absolutely nothing. She stood bewildered, silent, longing childishly to speak, to influence him, but not knowing what cue to take.

"And then—" he went on presently (but was the strange being speaking to her?)—"so long as I stay there, worrying those about me, and eating my own heart out, I am cut off from the only life that might be mine, that I might find the strength to live."

The words were low and deliberate. After his moment of passionate speech, and hers of passionate sympathy, she began to feel strangely remote from him.

"Do you mean the life of the student?" she asked him after a pause, timidly.

Her voice recalled him. He turned and smiled at her.

"Of the dreamer, rather."

And as her eyes still questioned, as he was still moved by the spell of her responsiveness, he let the new wave of feeling break in words. Vaguely at first, and then with a growing flame and force, he fell to describing to her what the life of thought may be to the thinker, and those marvellous moments which belong to that life when the mind which has divorced itself from desire and sense sees spread out before it the vast realms of knowledge, and feels itself close to the secret springs and sources of being. And as he spoke, his language took an ampler turn, the element of smallness which attaches to all mere personal complaint vanished, his words flowed, became eloquent, inspired, till the bewildered child beside him, warm through and through as she was

with youth and passion, felt for an instant by sheer fascinated sympathy the cold spell, the ineffable prestige, of the thinker's voluntary death in life.

But only for an instant. Then the natural sense of chill smote her to the heart.

"You make me shiver," she cried, interrupting him. "Have those strange things—I don't understand them—made you happy? Can they make any one happy? Oh no, no! Happiness is to be got from living, seeing, experiencing, making friends, enjoying nature! Look at the world, Mr. Langham!" she said, with bright cheeks, half smiling at her own magniloquence, her hand waving over the view before them. "What has it done that you should hate it so? If you can't put up with people you might love nature. I—I can't be content with nature, because I want some life first. Up in Whindale there is too much nature, not enough life. But if I had got through life—if it had disappointed me—then I should love nature. I keep saying to the mountains at home: 'Not *now*, not *now*; I want something else, but afterwards if I can't get it, or if I get too much of it, why then I will love you, live with you. You are my second string, my reserve. You—and art—and poetry.'"

"But everything depends on feeling," he said softly, but lightly, as though to keep the conversation from slipping back into those vague depths it had emerged from; "and if one has forgotten how to feel—if when one sees or hears something beautiful that used to stir one, one can only say 'I remember it moved me once!'—if feeling dies, like life, like physical force, but prematurely, long before the rest of the man!"

She gave a long quivering sigh of passionate antagonism.

"Oh, I cannot imagine it!" she cried. "I shall feel to my last hour." Then, after a pause, in another tone, "But, Mr. Langham, you say music excites you, Wagner excites you?"

"Yes, a sort of strange second life I can still get out of music," he admitted, smiling.

"Well then," and she looked at him persuasively, "why not give yourself up to music? It is so easy—so little trouble to one's self—it just takes you and carries you away."

Then, for the first time, Langham became conscious—probably through these admonitions of hers—that the situation had absurdity in it.

"It is not my *métier*," he said hastily. "The self that enjoys music is an outer self, and can only bear with it for a short time. No, Miss Leyburn, I shall leave Oxford, the college will sing a *Te Deum*, I shall settle down in London, I shall keep a big book going, and cheat the years after all, I suppose, as well as most people."

"And you will know, you will remember," she said faltering, reddening, her womanliness forcing the words out of her, "that you have friends: Robert—my sister—all of us?"

He faced her with a little quick movement. And as their eyes met each was struck once more with the personal beauty of the other. His eyes shone—their black depths seemed all tenderness.

"I will never forget this visit, this garden, this hour," he said slowly, and they stood looking at each other. Rose felt herself swept off her feet into a world of tragic mysterious emotion. She all but put her hand into his again, asking him childishly to hope, to be consoled.

But the maidenly impulse restrained her, and once more he leant on the gate, burying his face in his hands.

Suddenly he felt himself utterly tired, relaxed. Strong nervous reaction set in. What had all this scene, this tragedy, been about? And then in another instant was that sense of the ridiculous again clamouring to be heard. He—the man of thirty-five—confessing himself, making a tragic scene, playing Manfred or Cain to this adorable half-fledged creature, whom he had known five days! Supposing Elsmere had been there to hear—Elsmere with his sane eye, his laugh! As he leant over the gate he found himself quivering with impatience to be away—by himself—out of reach—the critic in him making the most bitter remorseless mock of all these heroics and despairs the other self had been indulging in. But for the life of him he could not find a word to say—a move to make. He stood hesitating, *gauche*, as usual.

“Do you know, Mr. Langham,” said Rose lightly, by his side, “that there is no time at all left for *you* to give *me* good advice in? That is an obligation still hanging over you. I don’t mean to release you from it, but if I don’t go in now and finish the covering of those library books, the youth of Murewell will be left without any literature till Heaven knows when!”

He could have blessed her for the tone, for the escape into common mundanity.

“Hang literature—hang the parish library!” he said with a laugh as he moved after her. Yet his real inner feeling towards that parish library was one of infinite friendliness.

“Hear these men of letters!” she said scornfully. But she was happy; there was a glow on her cheek.

A bramble caught her dress; she stopped and laid her white hand to it, but in vain. He knelt in an instant, and between them they wrenched it away, but not till those soft slim fingers had several times felt the neighbourhood of his brown ones, and till there had flown through and through him once more, as she stooped over him, the consciousness that she was young, that she was beautiful, that she had pitied him so sweetly, that they were alone.

“Rose!”

It was Catherine calling—Catherine, who stood at the end of the grass-path, with eyes all indignation and alarm.

Langham rose quickly from the ground.

He felt as though the gods had saved him—or damned him—which?

CHAPTER XVII.

MUREWELL RECTORY during the next forty-eight hours was the scene of much that might have been of interest to a psychologist gifted with the power of divining his neighbours.

In the first place Catherine's terrors were all alive again. Robert had never seen her so moved since those days of storm and stress before their engagement.

“I cannot bear it!” she said to Robert at night in their room. “I cannot bear it! I hear it always in my ears: ‘What hast thou done with thy sister?’ Oh, Robert, don’t mind, dear, though he is your friend. My father would have shrunk from him with horror—*An alien from the household of faith! An enemy to the Cross of Christ!*”

She flung out the words with low intense emphasis and frowning brow, standing rigid by the window, her hands locked behind her. Robert stood by her much perplexed, feeling himself a good deal of a culprit, but inwardly conscious that he knew a great deal more about Langham than she did.

"My dear wife," he said to her, "I am certain Langham has no intention of marrying."

"Then more shame for him," cried Catherine, flushing. "They could not have looked more conscious, Robert, when I found them together, if he had just proposed."

"What, in five days?" said Robert, more than half inclined to banter his wife. Then he fell into meditation as Catherine made no answer. "I believe with men of that sort," he said at last, "relations to women are never more than half-real—always more or less literature—acting. Langham is tasting an experience, to be bottled up for future use."

It need hardly be said, however, that Catherine got small consolation out of this point of view. It seemed to her Robert did not take the matter quite rightly.

"After all, darling," he said at last, kissing her, "you can act dragon splendidly; you have already—so can I. And you really cannot make me believe in anything very tragic in a week."

But Catherine was conscious that she had already played the dragon hard, to very little purpose. In the forty hours that intervened between the scene in the garden and the squire's dinner-party, Robert was always wanting to carry off Langham, Catherine was always asking Rose's help in some household business or other. In vain. Langham said to himself calmly, this time, that

Elsmere and his wife were making a foolish mistake in supposing that his friendship with Miss Leyburn was anything to be alarmed about, that they would soon be amply convinced of it themselves, and meanwhile he should take his own way. And as for Rose, they had no sooner turned back all three from the house to the garden than she had divined everything in Catherine's mind, and set herself against her sister with a wilful force in which many a past irritation found expression.

How Catherine hated the music of that week! It seemed to her she never opened the drawing-room door but she saw Langham at the piano, his head with its crown of glossy, curling black hair and his eyes lit with unwonted gleams of laughter and sympathy, turned towards Rose, who was either chatting wildly to him, mimicking the airs of some professional, or taking off the ways of some famous teacher; or else, which was worse, playing with all her soul, flooding the house with sound—now as soft and delicate as first love, now as full and grand as storm waves on an angry coast. And the sister going with compressed lip to her work-table would recognise sorely that never had the girl looked so handsome, and never had the lightnings of a wayward genius played so finely about her.

As to Langham, it may well be believed that after the scene in the garden he had rated, satirised, examined himself in the most approved introspective style. One half of him declared that scene to have been the heights of melodramatic absurdity; the other thought of it with a thrill of tender gratitude towards the young pitiful creature who had evoked it. After all, why, because he was alone in the world and must remain so, should he feel bound to refuse this one gift of the gods, the delicate

passing gift of a girl's—a child's friendship? As for her, the man's very real, though wholly morbid, modesty scouted the notion of love on her side. *He* was a likely person for a beauty on the threshold of life and success to fall in love with; but she meant to be kind to him, and he smiled a little inward indulgent smile over her very evident compassion, her very evident intention of reforming him, reconciling him to life. And, finally, he was incapable of any further resistance. He had gone too far with her. Let her do what she would with him, dear child, with the sharp tongue and the soft heart, and the touch of genius and brilliancy which made her future so interesting! He called his age and his disillusion to the rescue; he posed to himself as stooping to her in some sort of elder-brotherly fashion; and if every now and then some disturbing memory of that strange scene between them would come to make his present rôle less plausible, or some whim of hers made it difficult to play, why then at bottom there was always the consciousness that sixty hours, or thereabouts, would see him safely settled in that morning train to London. Throughout it is probable that that morning train occupied the saving back-ground of his thoughts.

The two days passed by, and the squire's dinner-party arrived. About seven on the Thursday evening a party of four might have been seen hurrying across the park—Langham and Catherine in front, Elsmere and Rose behind. Catherine had arranged it so, and Langham, who understood perfectly that his friendship with her young sister was not at all to Mrs. Elsmere's taste, and who had by now taken as much of a dislike to her as his nature was capable of, was certainly doing nothing to make his walk with her otherwise than difficult. And

every now and then some languid epigram would bring Catherine's eyes on him with a fiery gleam in their gray depths. Oh, fourteen more hours and she would have shut the rectory gate on this most unwelcome of intruders! She had never felt so vindictively anxious to see the last of any one in her life. There was in her a vehemence of antagonism to the man's manner, his pessimism, his infidelity, his very ways of speaking and looking, which astonished even herself.

Robert's eager soul meanwhile, for once irresponsible to Catherine's, was full of nothing but the squire. At last the moment was come, and that dumb spiritual friendship he had formed through these long months with the philosopher and the *savant* was to be tested by sight and speech of the man. He bade himself a hundred times pitch his expectations low. But curiosity and hope were keen, in spite of everything.

Ah, those parish worries! Robert caught the smoke of Mile End in the distance, curling above the twilight woods, and laid about him vigorously with his stick on the squire's shrubs, as he thought of those poisonous hovels, those ruined lives! But, after all, it might be mere ignorance, and that wretch Henslowe might have been merely trading on his master's morbid love of solitude.

And then—all men have their natural conceits. Robert Elsmere would not have been the very human creature he was if, half-consciously, he had not counted a good deal on his own powers of influence. Life had been to him so far one long social success of the best kind. Very likely as he walked on to the great house over whose threshold lay the answer to the enigma of months, his mind gradually filled with some naïve young dream of

winning the squire, playing him with all sorts of honest arts, beguiling him back to life—to his kind.

Those friendly messages of his through Mrs. Darcy had been very pleasant.

“I wonder whether my Oxford friends have been doing me a good turn with the squire,” he said to Rose, laughing. “He knows the provost, of course. If they talked me over it is to be hoped my scholarship didn’t come up. Precious little the provost used to think of my abilities for Greek prose!”

Rose yawned a little behind her gloved hand. Robert had already talked a good deal about the squire, and he was certainly the only person in the group who was thinking of him. Even Catherine, absorbed in other anxieties, had forgotten to feel any thrill at their approaching introduction to the man who must of necessity mean so much to herself and Robert.

“Mr. and Mrs. Robert Elsmere,” said the butler, throwing open the carved and gilded doors.

Catherine—following her husband, her fine grave head and beautiful neck held a little more erect than usual—was at first conscious of nothing but the dazzle of western light which flooded the room, striking the stands of Japanese lilies, and the white figure of a clown in the famous Watteau opposite the window.

Then she found herself greeted by Mrs. Darcy, whose odd habit of holding her lace handkerchief in her right hand on festive occasions only left her two fingers for her guests. The mistress of the Hall—as diminutive and elf-like as ever in spite of the added dignity of her sweeping silk and the draperies of black lace with which her tiny head was adorned—kept tight hold of Catherine,

and called a gentleman standing in a group just behind her.

"Roger, here are Mr. and Mrs. Robert Elsmere. Mr. Elsmere, the squire remembers you in petticoats, and I'm not sure that I don't too."

Robert, smiling, looked beyond her to the advancing figure of the squire, but if Mr. Wendover heard his sister's remark he took no notice of it. He held out his hand stiffly to Robert, bowed to Catherine and Rose before extending to them the same formal greeting, and just recognised Langham as having met him at Oxford.

Having done so he turned back to the knot of people with whom he had been engaged on their entrance. His manner had been reserve itself. The *hauteur* of the grandee on his own ground was clearly marked in it, and Robert could not help fancying that towards himself there had even been something more. And not one of those phrases which, under the circumstances, would have been so easy and so gracious, as to Robert's childish connection with the place, or as to the squire's remembrance of his father, even though Mrs. Darcy had given him a special opening of the kind.

The young rector instinctively drew himself together, like one who has received a blow, as he moved across to the other side of the fireplace to shake hands with the worthy family doctor, old Meyrick, who was already well known to him. Catherine, in some discomfort, for she too had felt their reception at the squire's hands to be a chilling one, sat down to talk to Mrs. Darcy, disagreeably conscious the while that Rose and Langham left to themselves were practically *tête-à-tête*, and that, moreover, a large stand of flowers formed a partial screen between her and them. She could see, however, the gleam of

Rose's upstretched neck, as Langham, who was leaning on the piano beside her, bent down to talk to her; and when she looked next she caught a smiling motion of Langham's head and eyes towards the Romney portrait of Mr. Wendover's grandmother, and was certain when he stooped afterwards to say something to his companion, that he was commenting on a certain surface likeness there was between her and the young auburn-haired beauty of the picture. Hateful! And they would be sent down to dinner together to a certainty.

The other guests were Lady Charlotte Wynnstay, a cousin of the squire—a tall, imperious, loud-voiced woman, famous in London society for her relationships, her audacity, and the *salon* which in one way or another she managed to collect round her; her dark, thin, irritable-looking husband; two neighbouring clerics—the first, by name Longstaffe, a somewhat inferior specimen of the cloth, whom Robert cordially disliked; and the other, Mr. Bickerton, a gentle Evangelical, one of those men who help to ease the harshness of a cross-grained world, and to reconcile the cleverer or more impatient folk in it to the worries of living.

Lady Charlotte was already known by name to the Elsmeres as the aunt of one of their chief friends of the neighbourhood—the wife of a neighbouring squire whose property joined that of Murewell Hall, one Lady Helen Varley, of whom more presently. Lady Charlotte was the sister of the Duke of Sedbergh, one of the greatest of dukes, and the sister also of Lady Helen's mother, Lady Wanless. Lady Wanless had died prematurely, and her two younger children, Helen and Hugh Flaxman, creatures both of them of unusually fine and fiery quality, had dowe a good deal to their aunt. There were family

alliances between the Sedberghs and the Wendovers, and Lady Charlotte made a point of keeping up with the squire. She adored cynics and people who said piquant things, and it amused her to make her large tyrannous hand felt by the squire's timid, crack-brained, ridiculous little sister.

As to Dr. Meyrick, he was tall and gaunt as Don Quixote. His gray hair made a ragged fringe round his straight-backed head; he wore an old-fashioned neck-cloth; his long body had a perpetual stoop, as though of deference, and his spectacled look of mild attentiveness had nothing in common with that medical self-assurance with which we are all nowadays so familiar. Robert noticed presently that when he addressed Mrs. Darcy he said "Ma'am," making no bones at all about it; and his manner generally was the manner of one to whom class distinctions were the profoundest reality, and no burden at all on a naturally humble temper. Dr. Baker, of Whindale, accustomed to trouncing Mrs. Seaton, would have thought him a poor creature.

When dinner was announced, Robert found himself assigned to Mrs. Darcy; the squire took Lady Charlotte. Catherine fell to Mr. Bickerton, Rose to Mr. Wynnstay, and the rest found their way in as best they could. Catherine seeing the distribution was happy for a moment, till she found that if Rose was covered on her right she was exposed to the full fire of the enemy on her left, in other words that Langham was placed between her and Dr. Meyrick.

"Are your spirits damped at all by this magnificence?" Langham said to his neighbour as they sat down. The table was entirely covered with Japanese lilies, save for the splendid silver candelabra from which the light flashed,

first on to the faces of the guests, and then on to those of the family portraits, hung thickly round the room. A roof embossed with gilded Tudor roses on a ground of black oak hung above them; a rose-water dish in which the Merry Monarch had once dipped his hands, and which bore a record of the fact in the inscription on its sides, stood before them; and the servants were distributing to each guest silver soup-plates which had been the gift of Sarah, Duchess of Marlborough, in some moment of generosity or calculation, to the Wendover of her day.

"Oh dear, no!" said Rose carelessly. "I don't know how it is, I think I must have been born for a palace."

Langham looked at her, at the daring harmony of colour made by the reddish gold of her hair, the warm whiteness of her skin, and the brown-pink tints of her dress, at the crystals playing the part of diamonds on her beautiful neck, and remembered Robert's remarks to him. The same irony mingled with the same bitterness returned to him, and the elder brother's attitude became once more temporarily difficult. "Who is your neighbour?" he inquired of her presently.

"Lady Charlotte's husband," she answered mischievously, under her breath. "One needn't know much more about him I imagine!"

"And that man opposite?"

"Robert's pet aversion," she said calmly, without a change of countenance, so that Mr. Longstaffe opposite, who was studying her as he always studied pretty young women, stared at her through her remark in sublime ignorance of its bearing.

"And your sister's neighbour?"

"I can't hit him off in a sentence, he's too good!" said Rose laughing; "all I can say is that Mrs. Bickerton

has too many children, and the children have too many ailments for her ever to dine out."

"That will do; I see the existence," said Langham with a shrug. "But he has the look of an apostle, though a rather hunted one. Probably nobody here, except Robert, is fit to tie his shoes."

"The squire could hardly be called *empresé*," said Rose, after a second, with a curl of her red lips. Mr. Wynnstay was still safely engaged with Mrs. Darcy, and there was a buzz of talk largely sustained by Lady Charlotte.

"No," Langham admitted; "the manners I thought were not quite equal to the house."

"What possible reason could he have for treating Robert with those airs?" said Rose indignantly, ready enough in girl fashion to defend her belongings against the outer world. "He ought to be only too glad to have the opportunity of knowing him and making friends with him."

"You are a sister worth having;" and Langham smiled at her as she leant back in her chair, her white arms and wrists lying on her lap, and her slightly flushed face turned towards him. They had been on these pleasant terms of *camaraderie* all day, and the intimacy between them had been still making strides.

"Do you imagine I don't appreciate Robert because I make bad jokes about the choir and the clothing club?" she asked him, with a little quick repentance passing like a shadow through her eyes. "I always feel I play an odious part here. I can't like it—I can't—their life. I should hate it! And yet——"

She sighed remorsefully, and Langham, who five minutes before could have wished her to be always smiling, could now have almost asked to fix her as she was:

the eyes veiled, the soft lips relaxed in this passing instant of gravity.

“Ah! I forgot—” and she looked up again with light bewitching appeal—“there is still that question, my poor little question of Sunday night, when I was in that fine moral frame of mind and you were near giving me, I believe, the only good advice you ever gave in your life,—how shamefully you have treated it!”

One brilliant look, which Catherine for her torment caught from the other side of the table, and then in an instant the quick face changed and stiffened. Mr. Wynnstay was speaking to her, and Langham was left to the intermittent mercies of Dr. Meyrick, who though glad to talk, was also quite content, apparently, to judge from the radiant placidity of his look, to examine his wine, study his *menu*, and enjoy his *entrées* in silence, undisturbed by the uncertain pleasures of conversation.

Robert, meanwhile, during the first few minutes, in which Mr. Wynnstay had been engaged in some family talk with Mrs. Darcy, had been allowing himself a little deliberate study of Mr. Wendover across what seemed the safe distance of a long table. The squire was talking shortly and abruptly, yet with occasional flashes of shrill ungainly laughter, to Lady Charlotte, who seemed to have no sort of fear of him and to find him good company, and every now and then Robert saw him turn to Catherine on the other side of him, and with an obvious change of manner address some formal and constrained remark to her.

Mr. Wendover was a man of middle height and loose bony frame, of which, as Robert had noticed in the drawing-room, all the lower half had a thin and shrunken look. But the shoulders, which had the scholar's stoop,

and the head were massive and squarely outlined. The head was specially remarkable for its great breadth and comparative flatness above the eyes, and for the way in which the head itself dwarfed the face, which, as contrasted with the large angularity of the skull, had a pinched and drawn look. The hair was reddish-gray, the eyes small, but deep set under fine brows, and the thin-lipped wrinkled mouth and long chin had a look of hard sarcastic strength.

Generally the countenance was that of an old man, the furrows were deep, the skin brown and shrivelled. But the alertness and force of the man's whole expression showed that, if the body was beginning to fail, the mind was as fresh and masterful as ever. His hair, worn rather longer than usual, his loosely-fitting dress and slouching carriage gave him an un-English look. In general he impressed Robert as a sort of curious combination of the foreign *savant* with the English grandee, for while his manner showed a considerable consciousness of birth and social importance, the gulf between him and the ordinary English country gentleman could hardly have been greater, whether in points of appearance or, as Robert very well knew, in points of social conduct. And as Robert watched him, his thoughts flew back again to the library, to this man's past, to all that those eyes had seen and those hands had touched. He felt already a mysterious, almost a yearning, sense of acquaintance with the being who had just received him with such chilling, such unexpected, indifference.

The squire's manners, no doubt, were notorious, but even so, his reception of the new rector of the parish, the son of a man intimately connected for years with the place, and with his father, and to whom he had himself

shown what was for him considerable civility by letter and message, was sufficiently startling.

Robert, however, had no time to speculate on the causes of it, for Mrs. Darcy, released from Mr. Wynnstay, threw herself with glee on to her longed-for prey, the young and interesting-looking rector. First of all she cross-examined him as to his literary employments, and when by dint of much questioning she had forced particulars from him, Robert's mouth twitched as he watched her scuttling away from the subject, seized evidently with internal terrors lest she should have precipitated herself beyond hope of rescue into the jaws of the sixth century. Then with a view to regaining the lead and opening another and more promising vein, she asked him his opinion of Lady Selden's last novel, *Love in a Marsh*; and when he confessed ignorance she paused a moment, fork in hand, her small wrinkled face looking almost as bewildered as when, three minutes before, her rashness had well-nigh brought her face to face with Gregory of Tours as a topic of conversation.

But she was not daunted long. With little airs and bridlings infinitely diverting, she exchanged inquiry for the most beguiling confidence. She could appreciate "clever men," she said, for she—she too—was literary. Did Mr. Elsmere know—this in a hurried whisper, with sidelong glances to see that Mr. Wynnstay was safely occupied with Rose, and the squire with Lady Charlotte—that she had once *written a novel*?

Robert, who had been posted up in many things concerning the neighbourhood by Lady Helen Varley, could answer most truly that he had. Whereupon Mrs. Darcy beamed all over.

"Ah! but you haven't read it," she said regretfully.

"It was when I was Maid of Honour, you know. No Maid of Honour had ever written a novel before. It was quite an event. Dear Prince Albert borrowed a copy of me one night to read in bed—I have it still, with the page turned down where he left off." She hesitated. "It was only in the second chapter," she said at last with a fine truthfulness, "but you know he was so busy, all the Queen's work to do, of course, besides his own—poor man!"

Robert implored her to lend him the work, and Mrs. Darcy, with blushes which made her more weird than ever, consented.

Then there was a pause, filled by an acid altercation between Lady Charlotte and her husband, who had not found Rose as grateful for his attentions as, in his opinion, a pink and white nobody at a country dinner-party ought to be, and was glad of the diversion afforded him by some aggressive remark of his wife. He and she differed on three main points—politics; the decoration of their London house, Mr. Wynnstay being a lover of Louis Quinze, and Lady Charlotte a preacher of Morris; and the composition of their dinner-parties. Lady Charlotte, in the pursuit of amusement and notoriety, was fond of flooding the domestic hearth with all the people possessed of any sort of a name for any sort of a reason in London. Mr. Wynnstay loathed such promiscuity; and the company in which his wife compelled him to drink his wine had seriously soured a small irritable Conservative with more family pride than either nerves or digestion.

During the whole passage of arms, Mrs. Darcy watched Elsmere, cat-and-mouse fashion, with a further confidence burning within her, and as soon as there was once more a general burst of talk, she pounced upon him afresh.

Would he like to know that after thirty years she had just finished her *second* novel, unbeknown to her brother—as she mentioned him the little face darkened, took a strange bitterness—and it was just about to be entrusted to the post and a publisher?

Robert was all interest, of course, and inquired the subject. Mrs. Darcy expanded still more—could, in fact, have hugged him. But, just as she was launching into the plot a thought, apparently a scruple of conscience, struck her.

“Do you remember,” she began, looking at him a little darkly, askance, “what I said about my hobbies the other day? Now, Mr. Elsmere, will you tell me—don’t mind me—don’t be polite—have you ever heard people tell stories of me? Have you ever, for instance, heard them call me a—a—tuft-hunter?”

“Never!” said Robert heartily.

“They might,” she said, sighing. “I *am* a tuft-hunter. I can’t help it. And yet we *are* a good family, you know. I suppose it was that year at Court, and that horrid Warham afterwards. Twenty years in a cathedral town—and a very *little* cathedral town, after Windsor, and Buckingham Palace, and dear Lord Melbourne! Every year I came up to town to stay with my father for a month in the season, and if it hadn’t been for that I should have died—my husband knew I should. It was the world, the flesh, and the devil, of course, but it couldn’t be helped. But now,” and she looked plaintively at her companion, as though challenging him to a candid reply: “You *would* be more interesting, wouldn’t you, to tell the truth, if you had a handle to your name?”

“Immeasurably,” cried Robert, stifling his laughter

with immense difficulty, as he saw she had no inclination to laugh.

"Well, yes, you know. But it isn't right;" and again she sighed. "And so I have been writing this novel just for that. It is called—what do you think?—'Mr. Jones.' Mr. Jones is my hero—it's so good for me, you know, to think about a Mr. Jones."

She looked beamingly at him. "It must be indeed! Have you endowed him with every virtue?"

"Oh yes, and in the end, you know—" and she bent forward eagerly—"it all comes right. His father didn't die in Brazil without children after all, and the title——"

"What!" cried Robert, "so he *wasn't* Mr. Jones?"

Mrs. Darcy looked a little conscious.

"Well, no," she said guiltily, "not just at the end. But it *really* doesn't matter—not to the story."

Robert shook his head, with a look of protest as admonitory as he could make it, which evoked in her an answering expression of anxiety. But just at that moment a loud wave of conversation and of laughter seemed to sweep down upon them from the other end of the table, and their little private eddy was effaced. The squire had been telling an anecdote, and his clerical neighbours had been laughing at it.

"Ah!" cried Mr. Longstaffe, throwing himself back in his chair with a chuckle, "that was an Archbishop worth having!"

"A curious story," said Mr. Bickerton, benevolently, the point of it, however, to tell the truth, not being altogether clear to him. It seemed to Robert that the squire's keen eye, as he sat looking down the table, with his large nervous hands clasped before him, was specially fixed upon himself.

"May we hear the story?" he said, bending forward. Catherine, faintly smiling in her corner beside the host, was looking a little flushed and moved out of her ordinary quiet.

"It is a story of Archbishop Manners Sutton," said Mr. Wendover, in his dry nasal voice. "You probably know it, Mr. Elsmere. After Bishop Heber's consecration to the See of Calcutta, it fell to the Archbishop to make a valedictory speech, in the course of the luncheon at Lambeth which followed the ceremony. 'I have very little advice to give you as to your future career,' he said to the young bishop, 'but all that experience has given me I hand on to you. Place before your eyes two precepts, and two only. One is, Preach the Gospel; and the other is—*Put down enthusiasm!*' "

There was a sudden gleam of steely animation in the squire's look as he told his story, his eye all the while fixed on Robert. Robert divined in a moment that the story had been re-told for his special benefit, and that in some unexplained way the relations between him and the squire were already biassed. He smiled a little with faint politeness, and falling back into his place made no comment on the squire's anecdote. Lady Charlotte's eyeglass, having adjusted itself for a moment to the distant figure of the rector, with regard to whom she had been asking Dr. Meyrick for particulars, quite unmindful of Catherine's neighbourhood, turned back again towards the squire.

"An unblushing old worldling, I should call your Archbishop," she said briskly. "And a very good thing for him that he lived when he did. Our modern good people would have dusted his apron for him."

Lady Charlotte prided herself on those vigorous forms of speech, and the squire's neighbourhood generally called

out an unusual crop of them. The squire was still sitting with his hands on the table, his great brows bent, surveying his guests.

"Oh, of course all the sensible men are *dead!*" he said indifferently. "But that is a pet saying of mine—the Church of England in a nutshell".

Robert flushed, and after a moment's hesitation bent forward.

"What do you suppose," he asked quietly, "your Archbishop meant, Mr. Wendover, by enthusiasm? Non-conformity, I imagine."

"Oh, very possibly!" and again Robert found the hawk-like glance concentrated on himself. "But I like to give his remark a much wider extension. One may make it a maxim of general experience, and take it as fitting all the fools with a mission who have teased our generation—all your Kingsleys, and Maurices, and Ruskins—every one bent upon making any sort of aimless commotion, which may serve him both as an investment for the next world, and an advertisement for this."

"Upon my word, squire," said Lady Charlotte, "I hope you don't expect Mr. Elsmere to agree with you?"

Mr. Wendover made her a little bow.

"I have very little sanguineness of any sort in my composition," he said drily.

"I should like to know," said Robert, taking no notice of this by-play; "I should like to know, Mr. Wendover, leaving the Archbishop out of count, what *you* understand by this word enthusiasm in this maxim of yours?"

"An excellent manner," thought Lady Charlotte, who, for all her noisiness, was an extremely shrewd woman, "an excellent manner and an unprovoked attack."

Catherine's trained eye, however, had detected signs

in Robert's look and bearing which were lost on Lady Charlotte, and which made her look nervously on. As to the rest of the table, they had all fallen to watching the "break" between the new rector and their host with a good deal of curiosity.

The squire paused a moment before replying,—

"It is not easy to put it tersely," he said at last; "but I may define it, perhaps, as the mania for mending the roof of your right-hand neighbour with straw torn off the roof of your left-hand neighbour; the custom, in short, of robbing Peter to propitiate Paul."

"Precisely," said Mr. Wynnstay warmly; "all the ridiculous Radical nostrums of the last fifty years—you have hit them off exactly. Sometimes you rob more and propitiate less; sometimes you rob less and propitiate more. But the principle is always the same." And mindful of all those intolerable evenings, when these same Radical nostrums had been forced down his throat at his own table, he threw a pugnacious look at his wife, who smiled back serenely in reply. There is small redress indeed for these things, when out of the common household stock the wife possesses most of the money, and a vast proportion of the brains.

"And the cynic takes pleasure in observing," interrupted the squire, "that the man who effects the change of balance does it in the loftiest manner, and profits in the vulgarest way. Other trades may fail. The agitator is always sure of *his* market."

He spoke with a harsh contemptuous insistence which was gradually setting every nerve in Robert's body tingling. He bent forward again, his long thin frame and boyish bright-complexioned face making an effective contrast to the squire's bronzed and wrinkled squareness.

"Oh, if you and Mr. Wynnstay are prepared to draw an indictment against your generation and all its works, I have no more to say," he said, smiling still, though his voice had risen a little in spite of himself. "I should be content to withdraw with my Burke into the majority. I imagined your attack on enthusiasm had a narrower scope, but if it is to be made synonymous with social progress I give up. The subject is too big. Only——"

He hesitated. Mr. Wynnstay was studying him with somewhat insolent coolness; Lady Charlotte's eyeglass never wavered from his face, and he felt through every fibre the tender timid admonitions of his wife's eyes.

"However," he went on after an instant, "I imagine that we should find it difficult anyhow to discover common ground. I regard your Archbishop's maxim, Mr. Wendover," and his tone quickened and grew louder, "as first of all a contradiction in terms; and in the next place, to me, almost all enthusiasms are respectable!"

"You are one of those people, I see," returned Mr. Wendover, after a pause, with the same nasal emphasis and the same *hauteur*, "who imagine we owe civilisation to the heart; that mankind has *felt* its way—literally. The school of the majority, of course—I admit it amply. I, on the other hand, am with the benighted minority who believe that the world, so far as it has lived to any purpose, has lived by the *head*," and he flung the noun at Robert scornfully. "But I am quite aware that in a world of claptrap the philosopher gets all the kicks, and the philanthropists, to give them their own label, all the halfpence."

The impassive tone had gradually warmed to a heat which was unmistakable. Lady Charlotte looked on with increasing relish. To her all society was a comedy played

for her entertainment, and she detected something more dramatic than usual in the juxtaposition of these two men. That young rector might be worth looking after. The dinners in Martin Street were alarmingly in want of fresh blood. As for poor Mr. Bickerton, he had begun to talk hastily to Catherine, with a sense of something tumbling about his ears; while Mr. Longstaffe, eyeglass in hand, surveyed the table with a distinct sense of pleasurable entertainment. He had not seen much of Elsmere yet, but it was as clear as daylight that the man was a firebrand, and should be kept in order.

Meanwhile there was a pause between the two main disputants; the storm-clouds were deepening outside, and rain had begun to patter on the windows. Mrs. Darcy was just calling attention to the weather when the squire unexpectedly returned to the charge.

"The one necessary thing in life," he said, turning to Lady Charlotte, a slight irritating smile playing round his strong mouth, "is—not to be duped. Put too much faith in these fine things the altruists talk of, and you arrive one day at the condition of Louis XIV. after the battle of Ramillies: 'Dieu a donc oublié tout ce que j'ai fait pour lui?' Read your Renan; remind yourself at every turn that it is quite possible after all the egotist *may* turn out to be in the right of it, and you will find at any rate that the world gets on excellently well without your blundering efforts to set it straight. And so we get back to the Archbishop's maxim—adapted, no doubt, to English requirements," and he shrugged his great shoulders expressively: "*Pace* Mr. Elsmere, of course, and the rest of our clerical friends!"

Again he looked down the table, and the strident voice sounded harsher than ever as it rose above the

sudden noise of the storm outside. Robert's bright eyes were fixed on the squire, and before Mr. Wendover stopped Catherine could see the words of reply trembling on his lips.

"I am well content," he said, with a curious dry intensity of tone. "I give you your Renan. Only leave us poor dupes our illusions. We will not quarrel with the division. With you all the cynics of history; with us all the 'scorners of the ground' from the world's beginning until now!"

The squire made a quick impatient movement. Mr. Wynnstay looked significantly at his wife, who dropped her eyeglass with a little irrepressible smile.

As for Robert, leaning forward with hastened breath, it seemed to him that his eyes and the squire's crossed like swords. In Robert's mind there had arisen a sudden passion of antagonism. Before his eyes there was a vision of a child in a stifling room, struggling with mortal disease, imposed upon her, as he hotly reminded himself, by this man's culpable neglect. The dinner-party, the splendour of the room, the conversation, excited a kind of disgust in him. If it were not for Catherine's pale face opposite, he could hardly have maintained his self-control.

Mrs. Darcy, a little bewildered, and feeling that things were not going particularly well, thought it best to interfere.

"Roger," she said plaintively, "you must not be so philosophical. It's too hot! He used to talk like that," she went on, bending over to Mr. Wynnstay, "to the French priests who came to see us last winter in Paris. They never minded a bit—they used to laugh. 'Monsieur votre frère, madame, c'est un homme qui a trop lu,' they would say to me when I gave them their coffee. Oh, they were such dears, those old priests! Roger said they had great hopes of me."

The chatter was welcome, the conversation broke up. The squire turned to Lady Charlotte, and Rose to Langham.

"Why didn't you support Robert?" she said to him, impulsively, with a dissatisfied face. "He was alone, against the table!"

"What good should I have done him?" he asked, with a shrug. "And pray, my lady confessor, what enthusiasms do you suspect me of?"

He looked at her intently. It seemed to her they were by the gate again—the touch of his lips on her hand. She turned from him hastily to stoop for her fan which had slipped away. It was only Catherine who, to her annoyance, saw the scarlet flush leap into the fair face. An instant later Mrs. Darcy had given the signal.

CHAPTER XVIII.

AFTER dinner Lady Charlotte fixed herself at first on Catherine, whose quiet dignity during the somewhat trying ordeal of the dinner had impressed her, but a few minutes' talk produced in her the conviction that without a good deal of pains—and why should a Londoner, accustomed to the cream of things, take pains with a country clergyman's wife?—she was not likely to get much out of her. Her appearance promised more, Lady Charlotte thought, than her conversation justified, and she looked about for easier game.

"Are you Mr. Elsmere's sister?" said a loud voice over Rose's head; and Rose, who had been turning over an illustrated book, with a mind wholly detached from it, looked up to see Lady Charlotte's massive form standing over her.

"No, his sister-in-law," said Rose, flushing in spite of herself, for Lady Charlotte was distinctly formidable.

"Hum," said her questioner, depositing herself beside her. "I never saw two sisters more unlike. You have got a very argumentative brother-in-law."

Rose said nothing, partly from awkwardness, partly from rising antagonism.

"Did you agree with him?" asked Lady Charlotte, putting up her glass and remorselessly studying every detail of the pink dress, its ornaments, and the slippered feet peeping out beneath it.

"Entirely," said Rose fearlessly, looking her full in the face.

"And what can you know about it, I wonder? However, you are on the right side. It is the fashion nowadays to have enthusiasms. I suppose you muddle about among the poor like other people?"

"I know nothing about the poor," said Rose.

"Oh, then, I suppose you feel yourself effective enough in some other line?" said the other coolly. "What is it—lawn tennis, or private theatricals, or—hem—prettiness?" And again the eyeglass went up.

"Whichever you like," said Rose calmly, the scarlet on her cheek deepening, while she resolutely reopened her book. The manner of the other had quite effaced in her all that sense of obligation, as from the young to the old, which she had been very carefully brought up in. Never had she beheld such an extraordinary woman.

"Don't read," said Lady Charlotte complacently. "Look at me. It's your duty to talk to me, you know; and I won't make myself any more disagreeable than I

can help. I generally make myself disagreeable, and yet, after all, there are a great many people who like me."

Rose turned a countenance rippling with suppressed laughter on her companion. Lady Charlotte had a large fair face, with a great deal of nose and chin, and an erection of lace and feathers on her head that seemed in excellent keeping with the masterful emphasis of those features. Her eyes stared frankly and unblushingly at the world, only softened at intervals by the glasses which were so used as to make them a most effective adjunct of her conversation. Socially, she was absolutely devoid of weakness or of shame. She found society extremely interesting, and she always struck straight for the desirable things in it, making short work of all those delicate tentative processes of acquaintanceship by which men and women ordinarily sort themselves. Rose's brilliant vivacious beauty had caught her eye at dinner; she adored beauty as she adored anything effective, and she always took a queer pleasure in bullying her way into a girl's liking. It is a great thing to be persuaded that at bottom you have a good heart. Lady Charlotte was so persuaded, and allowed herself many things in consequence.

"What shall we talk about?" said Rose demurely. "What a magnificent old house this is!"

"Stuff and nonsense! I don't want to talk about the house. I am sick to death of it. And if your people live in the parish, you are too. I return to my question. Come, tell me, what is your particular line in life? I am sure you have one, by your face. You had better tell me; it will do you no harm."

Lady Charlotte settled herself comfortably on the sofa,

and Rose, seeing that there was no chance of escaping her tormentor, felt her spirits rise to an encounter.

"Really—Lady Charlotte—" and she looked down, and then up, with a feigned bashfulness—"I—I—play a little."

"Humph!" said her questioner again, rather disconcerted by the obvious missishness of the answer. "You do, do you? More's the pity. No woman who respects herself ought to play the piano nowadays. A professional told me the other day that until nineteen-twenties of the profession were strung up, there would be no chance for the rest; and as for amateurs, there is simply *no* room for them whatever. I can't conceive anything more *passé* than amateur pianoforte playing!"

"I don't play the piano," said Rose meekly.

"What—the fashionable instrument, the banjo?" laughed Lady Charlotte. "That would be really striking."

Rose was silent again, the corners of her mouth twitching.

"Mrs. Darcy," said her neighbour, raising her voice, "this young lady tells me she plays something; what is it?"

Mrs. Darcy looked in a rather helpless way at Catherine. She was dreadfully afraid of Lady Charlotte.

Catherine, with a curious reluctance, gave the inquired information; and then Lady Charlotte insisted that the violin should be sent for, as it had not been brought.

"Who accompanies you?" she inquired of Rose.

"Mr. Langham plays very well," said Rose indifferently.

Lady Charlotte raised her eyebrows. "That dark, Byronic-looking creature who came with you? I should not have imagined him capable of anything sociable. Letitia, shall I send my maid to the rectory, or can you spare a man?"

Mrs. Darcy hurriedly gave orders, and Rose, inwardly furious, was obliged to submit. Then Lady Charlotte, having gained her point, and secured a certain amount of diversion for the evening, lay back on the sofa, used her fan, and yawned till the gentlemen appeared.

When they came in, the precious violin which Rose never trusted to any other hands but her own without trepidation had just arrived, and its owner, more erect than usual, because more nervous, was trying to prop up a dilapidated music-stand which Mrs. Darcy had unearthed for her. As Langham came in, she looked up and beckoned to him.

"Do you see?" she said to him impatiently, "they have made me play. Will you accompany me? I am very sorry, but there is no one else."

If there was one thing Langham loathed on his own account, it was any sort of performance in public. But the half-plaintive look which accompanied her last words showed that she knew it, and he did his best to be amiable.

"I am altogether at your service," he said, sitting down with resignation.

"It is all that tiresome woman, Lady Charlotte Wynnstay," she whispered to him behind the music-stand. "I never saw such a person in my life."

"Macaulay's Lady Holland without the brains," suggested Langham with languid vindictiveness as he gave her the note.

Meanwhile Mr. Wynnstay and the squire sauntered in together.

"A village Norman-Néruda?" whispered the guest to the host. The squire shrugged his shoulders.

"Hush!" said Lady Charlotte, looking severely at her husband. Mr. Wynnstay's smile instantly disappeared;

he leant against the doorway and stared sulkily at the ceiling. Then the musicians began, on some Hungarian melodies put together by a younger rival of Brahms. They had not played twenty bars before the attention of every one in the room was more or less seized—unless we except Mr. Bickerton, whose children, good soul, were all down with some infantile ailment or other, and who was employed in furtively watching the clock all the time to see when it would be decent to order round the pony-carriage which would take him back to his pale overweighted spouse.

First came wild snatches of march music, primitive, savage, non-European; then a waltz of the lightest, maddest rhythm, broken here and there by strange barbaric clashes; then a song, plaintive and clinging, rich in the subtlest shades and melancholies of modern feeling.

“Ah, but *excellent!*” said Lady Charlotte once, under her breath, at a pause; “and what *entrain*—what beauty!”

For Rose’s figure was standing thrown out against the dusky blue of the tapestried walls, and from that delicate relief every curve, every grace, each tint—hair and cheek and gleaming arm gained an enchanting picture-like distinctness. There was jessamine at her waist and among the gold of her hair; the crystals on her neck, and on the little shoe thrown forward beyond her dress, caught the lamplight.

“How can that man play with her and not fall in love with her?” thought Lady Charlotte to herself, with a sigh, perhaps, for her own youth. “He looks cool enough, however; the typical don with his nose in the air!”

Then the slow passionate sweetness of the music swept her away with it, she being in her way a connoisseur, and she ceased to speculate. When the sounds ceased

there was silence for a moment. Mrs. Darcy, who had a piano in her sitting-room whereon she strummed every morning with her tiny rheumatic fingers, and who had, as we know, strange little veins of sentiment running all about her, stared at Rose with open mouth. So did Catherine. Perhaps it was then for the first time that, touched by this publicity, this contagion of other people's feeling, Catherine realised fully against what a depth of stream she had been building her useless barriers.

"More! more!" cried Lady Charlotte.

The whole room seconded the demand save the squire and Mr. Bickerton. They withdrew together into a distant oriel. Robert, who was delighted with his little sister-in-law's success, went smiling to talk of it to Mrs. Darcy, while Catherine with a gentle coldness answered Mr. Longstaffe's questions on the same theme.

"Shall we?" said Rose, panting a little, but radiant, looking down on her companion.

"Command me!" he said, his grave lips slightly smiling, his eyes taking in the same vision that had charmed Lady Charlotte's. What a "child of grace and genius!"

"But do you like it?" she persisted.

"Like it—like accompanying your playing?"

"Oh no!"—impatiently; "showing off, I mean. I am quite ready to stop."

"Go on; go on!" he said, laying his finger on the A. "You have driven all my *mauvaise honte* away. I have not heard you play so splendidly yet."

She flushed all over. "Then we will go on," she said briefly.

So they plunged again into an Andante and Scherzo of Beethoven. How the girl threw herself into it, bringing out the wailing love-song of the Andante, the dainty

tripping mirth of the Scherzo, in a way which set every nerve in Langham vibrating! Yet the art of it was wholly unconscious. The music was the mere natural voice of her inmost self. A comparison full of excitement was going on in that self between her first impressions of the man beside her, and her consciousness of him, as he seemed to-night, human, sympathetic, kind. A blissful sense of a mission filled the young silly soul. Like David, she was pitting herself and her gift against those dark powers which may invade and paralyse a life.

After the shouts of applause at the end had yielded to a burst of talk, in the midst of which Lady Charlotte, with exquisite infelicity, might have been heard laying down the law to Catherine as to how her sister's remarkable musical powers might be best perfected, Langham turned to his companion,—

“Do you know that for years I have enjoyed nothing so much as the music of the last two days?”

His black eyes shone upon her, transfused with something infinitely soft and friendly. She smiled. “How little I imagined that first evening that you cared for music!”

“Or about anything else worth caring for?” he asked her, laughing, but with always that little melancholy note in the laugh.

“Oh, if you like,” she said, with a shrug of her white shoulders. “I believe you talked to Catherine the whole of the first evening, when you weren't reading *Hamlet* in the corner, about the arrangements for women's education at Oxford.”

“Could I have found a more respectable subject?” he inquired of her.

“The adjective is excellent,” she said with a little

face, as she put her violin into its case. "If I remember right, Catherine and I felt it personal. None of us were ever educated, except in arithmetic, sewing, English history, the Catechism, and *Paradise Lost*. I taught myself French at seventeen, because one Molière wrote plays in it, and German because of Wagner. But they are *my* French and *my* German. I wouldn't advise anybody else to steal them!"

Langham was silent, watching the movements of the girl's agile fingers.

"I wonder," he said at last, slowly, "when I shall play that Beethoven again?"

"To-morrow morning if you have a conscience," she said drily; "we murdered one or two passages in fine style."

He looked at her, startled. "But I go by the morning train!" There was an instant's silence. Then the violin case shut with a snap.

"I thought it was to be Saturday," she said abruptly.

"No," he answered with a sigh, "it was always Friday. There is a meeting in London I must get to to-morrow afternoon."

"Then we shan't finish these Hungarian duets," she said slowly, turning away from him to collect some music on the piano.

Suddenly a sense of the difference between the week behind him, with all its ups and downs, its quarrels, its *ennuis*, its moments of delightful intimacy, of artistic freedom and pleasure, and those threadbare monotonous weeks into which he was to slip back on the morrow, awoke in him a mad inconsequent sting of disgust, of self-pity.

"No, we shall finish nothing," he said in a voice which only she could hear, his hands lying on the keys; "there are some whose destiny it is never to finish—"

never to have enough—to leave the feast on the table, and all the edges of life ragged!”

Her lips trembled. They were far away, in the vast room, from the group Lady Charlotte was lecturing. Her nerves were all unsteady with music and feeling, and the face looking down on him had grown pale.

“We make our own destiny,” she said impatiently. “*We* choose. It is all our own doing. Perhaps destiny begins things—friendship, for instance; but afterwards it is absurd to talk of anything but ourselves. We keep our friends, our chances, our—our joys,” she went on hurriedly, trying desperately to generalise, “or we throw them away wilfully, because we choose.”

Their eyes were riveted on each other.

“Not wilfully,” he said under his breath. “But—no matter. May I take you at your word, Miss Leyburn? Wretched shirker that I am, whom even Robert’s charity despairs of: have I made a friend? Can I keep her?”

Extraordinary spell of the dark effeminate face—of its rare smile! The girl forgot all pride, all discretion. “Try,” she whispered, and as his hand, stretching along the keyboard, instinctively felt for hers, for one instant—and another, and another—she gave it to him.

“Albert, come here!” exclaimed Lady Charlotte, beckoning to her husband; and Albert, though with a bad grace, obeyed. “Just go and ask that girl to come and talk to me, will you? Why on earth didn’t you make friends with her at dinner?”

The husband made some irritable answer, and the wife laughed.

“Just like you!” she said, with a good humour which seemed to him solely caused by the fact of his non-suc-

cess with the beauty at table. "You always expect to kill at the first stroke. I mean to take her in tow. Go and bring her here."

Mr. Wynnstay sauntered off with as much dignity as his stature was capable of. He found Rose tying up her music at one end of the piano, while Langham was preparing to shut up the keyboard.

There was something appeasing in the girl's handsomeness. Mr. Wynnstay laid down his airs, paid her various compliments, and led her off to Lady Charlotte.

Langham stood by the piano, lost in a kind of miserable dream. Mrs. Darcy fluttered up to him.

"Oh, Mr. Langham, you play so *beautifully*! Do play a solo!"

He subsided on to the music-bench obediently. On any ordinary occasion tortures could not have induced him to perform in a room full of strangers. He had far too lively and fastidious a sense of the futility of the amateur.

But he played—what, he knew not. Nobody listened but Mrs. Darcy, who sat lost in an armchair a little way off, her tiny foot beating time. Rose stopped talking, started, tried to listen. But Lady Charlotte had had enough music, and so had Mr. Longstaffe, who was endeavouring to joke himself into the good graces of the Duke of Sedbergh's sister. The din of conversation rose at the challenge of the piano, and Langham was soon overcrowded.

Musically, it was perhaps as well, for the player's inward tumult was so great, that what his hands did he hardly knew or cared. He felt himself the greatest criminal unhung. Suddenly, through all that wilful mist of epicurean feeling which had been enwrapping him, there had pierced a sharp illumining beam from a girl's eyes

aglow with joy, with hope, with tenderness. In the name of Heaven, what had this growing degeneracy of every moral muscle led him to now? What! smile and talk, and smile—and be a villain all the time? What! encroach on a young life, like some creeping parasitic growth, taking all, able to give nothing in return—not even one genuine spark of genuine passion? Go philandering on till a child of nineteen shows you her warm impulsive heart, play on her imagination, on her pity, safe all the while in the reflection that by the next day you will be far away, and her task and yours will be alike to forget! He shrinks from himself as one shrinks from a man capable of injuring anything weak and helpless. To despise the world's social code, and then to fall conspicuously below its simplest articles; to aim at being pure intelligence, pure open-eyed rationality, and not even to succeed in being a gentleman, as the poor commonplace world understands it! Oh, to fall at her feet, and ask her pardon before parting for ever! But no—no more posing; no more dramatising. How can he get away most quietly—make least sign? The thought of that walk home in the darkness fills him with a passion of irritable impatience.

“Look at that Romney, Mr. Elsmere; just look at it!” cried Dr. Meyrick excitedly; “did you ever see anything finer? There was one of those London dealer fellows down here last summer offered the squire four thousand pounds down on the nail for it.”

In this way Meyrick had been taking Robert round the drawing-room, doing the honours of every stick and stone in it, his eyeglass in his eye, his thin old face shining with pride over the Wendover possessions. And

so the two gradually neared the oriel where the squire and Mr. Bickerton were standing.

Robert was in twenty minds as to any further conversation with the squire. After the ladies had gone, while every nerve in him was still tingling with anger, he had done his best to keep up indifferent talk on local matters with Mr. Bickerton. Inwardly he was asking himself whether he should ever sit at the squire's table and eat his bread again. It seemed to him that they had had a brush which would be difficult to forget. And as he sat there before the squire's wine, hot with righteous heat, all his grievances against the man and the landlord crowded upon him. A fig for intellectual eminence if it make a man oppress his inferiors and bully his equals!

But as the minutes passed on, the rector had cooled down. The sweet, placable, scrupulous nature began to blame itself. "What, play your cards so badly, give up the game so rashly, the very first round? Nonsense! Patience and try again. There must be some cause in the background. No need to be white-livered, but every need, in the case of such a man as the squire, to take no hasty needless offence."

So he had cooled and cooled, and now here were Meyrick and he close to the squire and his companion. The two men, as the rector approached, were discussing some cases of common enclosure that had just taken place in the neighbourhood. Robert listened a moment, then struck in. Presently, when the chat dropped, he began to express to the squire his pleasure in the use of the library. His manner was excellent, courtesy itself, but without any trace of effusion.

"I believe," he said at last, smiling, "my father used

to be allowed the same privileges. If so, it quite accounts for the way in which he clung to Murewell."

"I had never the honour of Mr. Edward Elsmere's acquaintance," said the squire frigidly. "During the time of his occupation of the rectory I was not in England."

"I know. Do you still go much to Germany? Do you keep up your relations with Berlin?"

"I have not seen Berlin for fifteen years," said the squire briefly, his eyes in their wrinkled sockets fixed sharply on the man who ventured to question him about himself, uninvited. There was an awkward pause. Then the squire turned again to Mr. Bickerton.

"Bickerton, have you noticed how many trees that storm of last February has brought down at the north-east corner of the park?"

Robert was inexpressibly galled by the movement, by the words themselves. The squire had not yet addressed a single remark of any kind about Murewell to *him*. There was a deliberate intention to exclude implied in this appeal to the man who was not the man of the place, on such a local point, which struck Robert very forcibly.

He walked away to where his wife was sitting.

"What time is it?" whispered Catherine, looking up at him.

"Time to go," he returned, smiling, but she caught the discomposure in his tone and look at once, and her wifely heart rose against the squire. She got up, drawing herself together with a gesture that became her.

"Then let us go at once," she said. "Where is Rose?"

A minute later there was a general leave-taking. Oddly enough it found the squire in the midst of a conversation with Langham. As though to show more clearly that it was the rector personally who was in his black

books, Mr. Wendover had already devoted some cold attention to Catherine both at and after dinner, and he had no sooner routed Robert than he moved in his slouching away across from Mr. Bickerton to Langham. And now, another man altogether, he was talking and laughing—describing apparently a reception at the French Academy—the epigrams flying, the harsh face all lit up, the thin bony fingers gesticulating freely.

The husband and wife exchanged glances as they stood waiting, while Lady Charlotte, in her loudest voice, was commanding Rose to come and see her in London any Thursday after the first of November. Robert was very sore. Catherine passionately felt it, and forgetting everything but him, longed to be out with him in the park comforting him.

“What an absurd fuss you have been making about that girl,” Wynnstay exclaimed to his wife as the Elsmere party left the room, the squire conducting Catherine with a chill politeness. “And now, I suppose, you will be having her up in town, and making some young fellow who ought to know better fall in love with her. I am told the father was a grammar-school headmaster. Why can’t you leave people where they belong?”

“I have already pointed out to you,” Lady Charlotte observed calmly, “that the world has moved on since you were launched into it. I can’t keep up class-distinctions to please you; otherwise, no doubt, being the devoted wife I am, I might try. However, my dear, we both have our fancies. You collect Sèvres china with or without a pedigree,” and she coughed drily; “I collect promising young women. On the whole, I think my hobby is more beneficial to you than yours is profitable to me.”

Mr. Wynnstay was furious. Only a week before he

had been childishly, shamefully taken in by a Jew curiosity-dealer from Vienna, to his wife's huge amusement. If looks could have crushed her, Lady Charlotte would have been crushed. But she was far too substantial as she lay back in her chair, one large foot crossed over the other, and, as her husband very well knew, the better man of the two. He walked away, murmuring under his moustache words that would hardly have borne publicity, while Lady Charlotte, through her glasses, made a minute study of a little French portrait hanging some two yards from her.

Meanwhile the Elsmere party were stepping out into the warm damp of the night. The storm had died away, but a soft Scotch mist of rain filled the air. Everything was dark, save for a few ghostly glimmerings through the trees of the avenue; and there was a strong sweet smell of wet earth and grass. Rose had drawn the hood of her waterproof over her head, and her face gleamed an indistinct whiteness from its shelter. Oh this leaping pulse—this bright glow of expectation! How had she made this stupid blunder about his going? Oh, it was Catherine's mistake, of course, at the beginning. But what matter? Here they were in the dark, side by side, friends now, friends always. Catherine should not spoil their last walk together. She felt a passionate trust that *he* would not allow it.

"Wifie!" exclaimed Robert, drawing her a little apart, "do you know it has just occurred to me that, as I was going through the park this afternoon by the lower foot-path, I crossed Henslowe coming away from the house. Of course this is what has happened! *He* has told his story first. No doubt just before I met him he had been

giving the squire a full and particular account—*à la* Henslowe—of my proceedings since I came. Henslowe lays it on thick—paints with a will. The squire receives me afterwards as the meddlesome pragmatical priest he understands me to be; puts his foot down to begin with; and, *hinc illæ lacrymæ*. It's as clear as daylight! I thought that man had an odd twist of the lip as he passed me."

"Then a disagreeable evening will be the worst of it," said Catherine proudly. "I imagine, Robert, you can defend yourself against that bad man?"

"He has got the start; he has no scruples; and it remains to be seen whether the squire has a heart to appeal to," replied the young rector with sore reflectiveness. "Oh, Catherine, have you ever thought, wife, what a business it will be for us if I *can't* make friends with that man? Here we are at his gates—all our people in his power; the *comfort*, at any rate, of our social life depending on him. And what a strange, unmanageable, inexplicable being!"

Elsmere sighed aloud. Like all quick imaginative natures he was easily depressed, and the squire's sombre figure had for the moment darkened his whole horizon. Catherine laid her cheek against his arm in the darkness, consoling, remonstrating, every other thought lost in her sympathy with Robert's worries. Langham and Rose slipped out of her head; Elsmere's step had quickened, as it always did when he was excited, and she kept up without thinking.

When Langham found the others had shot ahead in the darkness, and he and his neighbour were *tête-à-tête*, despair seized him. But for once he showed a sort of dreary presence of mind. Suddenly, while the girl be-

side him was floating in a golden dream of feeling, he plunged with a stiff deliberation born of his inner conflict into a discussion of the German system of musical training. Rose, startled, made some vague and flippant reply. Langham pursued the matter. He had some information about it, it appeared, garnered up in his mind, which might perhaps some day prove useful to her. A St. Anselm's undergraduate, one Dashwood, an old pupil of his, had been lately at Berlin for six months, studying at the Conservatorium. Not long ago, being anxious to become a schoolmaster, he had written to Langham for a testimonial. His letter had contained a full account of his musical life. Langham proceeded to recapitulate it.

His careful and precise report of hours, fees, masters, and methods lasted till they reached the park gate. He had the smallest powers of social acting, and his rôle was dismally overdone. The girl beside him could not know that he was really defending her from himself. His cold altered manner merely seemed to her a sudden and marked withdrawal of his petition for her friendship. No doubt she had received that petition too effusively—and he wished there should be no mistake.

What a young smarting soul went through in that half-mile of listening is better guessed than analysed. There are certain moments of shame, which only women know, and which seem to sting and burn out of youth all its natural sweet self-love. A woman may outlive them, but never forget them. If she pass through one at nineteen her cheek will grow hot over it at seventy. Her companion's measured tone, the flow of deliberate speech which came from him, the nervous aloofness of his attitude—every detail in that walk seemed to Rose's excited sense an insult.

As the park gate swung behind them she felt a sick longing for Catherine's shelter. Then all the pride in her rushed to the rescue and held that swooning dismay at the heart of her in check. And forthwith she capped Langham's minute account of the scale-method of a famous Berlin pianist by some witty stories of the latest London prodigy, a child-violinist, incredibly gifted, dirty, and greedy, whom she had made friends with in town. The girl's voice rang out sharp and hard under the trees. Where, in fortune's name, were the lights of the rectory? Would this nightmare never come to an end?

At the rectory gate was Catherine waiting for them, her whole soul one repentant alarm.

"Mr. Langham, Robert has gone to the study; will you go and smoke with him?"

"By all means. Good-night, then, Mrs. Elsmere."

Catherine gave him her hand. Rose was trying hard to fit the lock of the gate into the hasp, and had no hand free. Besides, he did not approach her.

"Good-night!" she said to him over her shoulder.

"Oh, and Mr. Langham!" Catherine called after him as he strode away, "will you settle with Robert about the carriage?"

He turned, made a sound of assent, and went on.

"When?" asked Rose lightly.

"For the nine o'clock train."

"There should be a law against interfering with people's breakfast hour," said Rose; "though, to be sure, a guest may as well get himself gone early and be done with it. How you and Robert raced, Cathie! We did our best to catch you up, but the pace was too good."

Was there a wild taunt, a spice of malice in the girl's reckless voice? Catherine could not see her in

the darkness, but the sister felt a sudden trouble invade her.

"Rose, darling, you are not tired?"

"Oh dear, no! Good-night, sleep well. What a goose Mrs. Darcy is!"

And, barely submitting to be kissed, Rose ran up the steps and upstairs.

Langham and Robert smoked till midnight. Langham for the first time gave Elsmere an outline of his plans for the future, and Robert, filled with dismay at this final breach with Oxford and human society, and the only form of practical life possible to such a man, threw himself into protests more and more vigorous and affectionate. Langham listened to them at first with sombre silence, then with an impatience which gradually reduced Robert to a sore puffing at his pipe. There was a long space during which they sat together, the ashes of the little fire Robert had made dropping on the hearth, and not a word on either side.

At last Elsmere could not bear it, and when midnight struck he sprang up with an impatient shake of his long body, and Langham took the hint, gave him a cold good-night, and went.

As the door shut upon him Robert dropped back into his chair, and sat on, his face in his hands, staring dolefully at the fire. It seemed to him the world was going crookedly. A day on which a man of singularly open and responsive temper makes a new enemy, and comes nearer than ever before to losing an old friend, shows very blackly to him in the calendar, and, by way of aggravation, Robert Elsmere says to himself at once that somehow or other there must be fault of his own in the matter.

Rose!—pshaw! Catherine little knows what stuff that cold intangible soul is made of.

Meanwhile, Langham was standing heavily, looking out into the night. The different elements in the mountain of discomfort that weighed upon him were so many that the weary mind made no attempt to analyse them. He had a sense of disgrace, of having stabbed something gentle that had leant upon him, mingled with a strong intermittent feeling of unutterable relief. Perhaps his keenest regret was that, after all, it had not been love! He had offered himself up to a girl's just contempt, but he had no recompense in the shape of a great addition to knowledge, to experience. Save for a few doubtful moments at the beginning, when he had all but surprised himself in something more poignant, what he had been conscious of had been nothing more than a suave and delicate charm of sentiment, a subtle surrender to one exquisite æsthetic impression after another. And these things in other relations the world had yielded him before.

"Am I sane?" he muttered to himself. "Have I ever been sane? Probably not. The disproportion between my motives and other men's is too great to be normal. Well, at least I am sane enough to shut myself up. Long after that beautiful child has forgotten she ever saw me I shall still be doing penance in the desert."

He threw himself down beside the open window with a groan. An hour later he lifted a face blanched and lined, and stretched out his hand with avidity towards a book on the table. It was an obscure and difficult Greek text, and he spent the greater part of the night over it, rekindling in himself with feverish haste the embers of his one lasting passion.

Meanwhile, in a room overhead, another last scene

in this most futile of dramas was passing. Rose, when she came in, had locked the door, torn off her dress and her ornaments, and flung herself on the edge of the bed, her hands on her knees, her shoulders drooping, a fierce red spot on either cheek. There for an indefinite time she went through a torture of self-scorn. The incidents of the week passed before her one by one—her sallies, her defiances, her impulsive friendliness, the *élan*, the happiness of the last two days, the self-abandonment of this evening. Oh, intolerable—intolerable!

And all to end with the intimation that she had been behaving like a forward child—had gone too far and must be admonished—made to feel accordingly! The poisoned arrow pierced deeper and deeper into the girl's shrinking pride. The very foundations of self-respect seemed overthrown.

Suddenly her eye caught a dim and ghostly reflection of her own figure, as she sat with locked hands on the edge of the bed, in a long glass near, the only one of the kind which the rectory household possessed. Rose sprang up, snatched at the candle, which was flickering in the air of the open window, and stood erect before the glass, holding the candle above her head.

What the light showed her was a slim form in a white dressing-gown, that fell loosely about it; a rounded arm up-stretched; a head, still crowned with its jessamine wreath, from which the bright hair fell heavily over shoulders and bosom; eyes, under frowning brows, flashing a proud challenge at what they saw; two lips, "indifferent red," just open to let the quick breath come through—all thrown into the wildest chiaroscuro by the wavering candle flame.

Her challenge was answered. The fault was not there. Her arm dropped. She put down the light.

"I *am* handsome," she said to herself, her mouth quivering childishly. "I am. I may say it to myself."

Then, standing by the window, she stared into the night. Her room, on the opposite side of the house from Langham's, looked over the cornfields and the distance. The stubbles gleamed faintly; the dark woods, the clouds teased by the rising wind, sent a moaning voice to greet her.

"I hate him! I hate him!" she cried to the darkness, clenching her cold little hand.

Then presently she slipped on to her knees, and buried her head in the bed-clothes. She was crying—angry stifled tears which had the hot impatience of youth in them. It all seemed to her so untoward. This was not the man she had dreamed of—the unknown of her inmost heart. *He* had been young, ardent, impetuous like herself. Hand in hand, eye flashing into eye, pulse answering to pulse, they would have flung aside the veil hanging over life and plundered the golden mysteries behind it.

She rebels; she tries to see the cold alien nature which has laid this paralysing spell upon her as it is, to reason herself back to peace—to indifference. The poor child flies from her own half-understood trouble; will none of it; murmurs again wildly—

"I hate him! I hate him! Cold-blooded—ungrateful—unkind!"

In vain. A pair of melancholy eyes haunt, enthrall her inmost soul. The charm of the denied, the inaccessible is on her, womanlike.

That old sense of capture, of helplessness, as of some lassoed struggling creature, descended upon her. She lay sobbing there, trying to recall what she had been a week before; the whirl of her London visit, the ambitions with which it had filled her; the bewildering many-coloured lights it had thrown upon life, the intoxicating sense of artistic power. In vain.

“The stream will not flow, and the hills will not rise;
And the colours have all passed away from her eyes.”

She felt herself bereft, despoiled. And yet through it all, as she lay weeping, there came flooding a strange contradictory sense of growth, of enrichment. In such moments of pain does a woman first begin to live? Ah! why should it hurt so—this long-awaited birth of the soul?

BOOK III.

THE SQUIRE.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE evening of the Murewell Hall dinner-party proved to be a date of some importance in the lives of two or three persons. Rose was not likely to forget it; Langham carried about with him the picture of the great drawing-room, its stately light and shade, and its scattered figures, through many a dismal subsequent hour; and to Robert it was the beginning of a period of practical difficulties such as his fortunate youth had never yet encountered.

His conjecture had hit the mark. The squire's sentiments towards him, which had been on the whole friendly enough, with the exception of a slight *nuance* of contempt provoked in Mr. Wendover's mind by all forms of the clerical calling, had been completely transformed in the course of the afternoon before the dinner-party, and transformed by the report of his agent. Henslowe, who knew certain sides of the squire's character by heart, had taken Time by the forelock. For fourteen years before Robert entered the parish he had been king of it. Mr. Preston, Robert's predecessor, had never given him a moment's trouble. The agent had developed a habit of drinking, had favoured his friends and spited his enemies, and had allowed certain distant portions of the estate to go finely

to ruin, quite undisturbed by any sentimental meddling of the priestly sort. Then the old rector had been gathered to the majority, and this long-legged busybody had taken his place, a man, according to the agent, as full of communistical notions as an egg is full of meat, and always ready to poke his nose into other people's business. And as all men like mastery, but especially Scotchmen, and as during even the first few months of the new rector's tenure of office it became tolerably evident to Henslowe that young Elsmere would soon become the ruling force of the neighbourhood unless measures were taken to prevent it, the agent, over his nocturnal drams, had taken sharp and cunning counsel with himself concerning the young man.

The state of Mile End had been originally the result of indolence and caprice on his part rather than of any set purpose of neglect. As soon, however, as it was brought to his notice by Elsmere, who did it, to begin with, in the friendliest way, it became a point of honour with the agent to let the place go to the devil, nay, to hurry it there. For some time notwithstanding, he avoided an open breach with the rector. He met Elsmere's remonstrances by a more or less civil show of argument, belied every now and then by the sarcasm of his coarse blue eye, and so far the two men had kept outwardly on terms. Elsmere had reason to know that on one or two occasions of difficulty in the parish Henslowe had tried to do him a mischief. The attempts, however, had not greatly succeeded, and their ill-success had probably excited in Elsmere a confidence of ultimate victory which had tended to keep him cool in the presence of Henslowe's hostility. But Henslowe had been all along merely waiting for the squire. He had served the owner of the

Murewell estate for fourteen years, and if he did not know that owner's peculiarities by this time, might he obtain certain warm corners in the next life to which he was fond of consigning other people! It was not easy to cheat the squire out of money, but it was quite easy to play upon his ignorance of the details of English land management—ignorance guaranteed by the learned habits of a lifetime—on his complete lack of popular sympathy, and on the contempt felt by the disciple of Bismarck and Mommsen for all forms of altruistic sentiment. The squire despised priests. He hated philanthropic cants. Above all things he respected his own leisure, and was abnormally, irritably sensitive as to any possible inroads upon it.

All these things Henslowe knew, and all these things he utilised. He saw the squire within forty-eight hours of his arrival at Murewell. His fancy picture of Robert and his doings was introduced with adroitness, and coloured with great skill, and he left the squire walking up and down his library, chafing alternately at the monstrous fate which had planted this sentimental agitator at his gates, and at the memory of his own misplaced civilities towards the intruder. In the evening those civilities were abundantly avenged, as we have seen.

Robert was much perplexed as to his next step. His heart was very sore. The condition of Mile End—those gaunt-eyed women and wasted children, all the sordid details of their unjust avoidable suffering weighed upon his nerves perpetually. But he was conscious that this state of feeling was one of tension, perhaps of exaggeration, and though it was impossible he should let the matter alone, he was anxious to do nothing rashly.

However, two days after the dinner-party he met

Henslowe on the hill leading up to the rectory. Robert would have passed the man with a stiffening of his tall figure and the slightest possible salutation. But the agent, just returned from a round wherein the bars of various local inns had played a conspicuous part, was in a truculent mood and stopped to speak. He took up the line of insolent condolence with the rector on the impossibility of carrying his wishes with regard to Mile End into effect. They had been laid before the squire, of course, but the squire had his own ideas and wasn't just easy to manage.

"Seen him yet, sir?" Henslowe wound up jauntily, every line of his flushed countenance, the full lips under the fair beard, and the light prominent eyes, expressing a triumph he hardly cared to conceal.

"I have seen him, but I have not talked to him on this particular matter," said the rector quietly, though the red mounted in his cheek. "You may, however, be very sure, Mr. Henslowe, that everything I know about Mile End the squire shall know before long."

"Oh, lor' bless me, sir!" cried Henslowe with a guffaw, "it's all one to me. And if the squire ain't satisfied with the way his work's done now, why he can take you on as a second string, you know. You'd show us all, I'll be bound, how to make the money fly."

Then Robert's temper gave way, and he turned upon the half-drunken brute before him with a few home-truths delivered with a rapier-like force which for the moment staggered Henslowe, who turned from red to purple. The rector, with some of those pitiful memories of the hamlet, of which we had glimpses in his talk with Langham, burning at his heart, felt the man no better than a murderer, and as good as told him so. Then,

without giving him time to reply, Robert strode on, leaving Henslowe planted in the pathway. But he was hardly up the hill before the agent, having recovered himself by dint of copious expletives, was looking after him with a grim chuckle. He knew his master, and he thought between them they would about manage to keep that young spark in order.

Robert meanwhile went straight home into his study, and there fell upon ink and paper. What was the good of protracting the matter any longer? Something must and should be done for these people, if not one way, then another.

So he wrote to the squire, showing the letter to Catherine when it was done, lest there should be anything over-fierce in it. It was the simple record of twelve months' experience told with dignity and strong feeling. Henslowe was barely mentioned in it, and the chief burden of the letter was to implore the squire to come and inspect certain portions of his property with his own eyes. The rector would be at his service any day or hour.

Husband and wife went anxiously through the document, softening here, improving there, and then it was sent to the Hall. Robert waited nervously through the day for an answer. In the evening, while he and Catherine were in the footpath after dinner, watching a chilly autumnal moonrise over the stubbles of the corn-field, the answer came.

"H'm," said Robert dubiously as he opened it, holding it up to the moonlight; "can't be said to be lengthy."

He and Catherine hurried into the house. Robert read the letter, and handed it to her without a word.

After some curt references to one or two miscellane-

ous points raised in the latter part of the rector's letter, the squire wound up as follows:—

“As for the bulk of your communication, I am at a loss to understand the vehemence of your remarks on the subject of my Mile End property. My agent informed me shortly after my return home that you had been concerning yourself greatly, and, as he conceived, unnecessarily about the matter. Allow me to assure you that I have full confidence in Mr. Henslowe, who has been in the district for as many years as you have spent months in it, and whose authority on points connected with the business management of my estate naturally carries more weight with me, if you will permit me to say so, than your own.—I am, sir, your obedient servant,

“ROGER WENDOVER.”

Catherine returned the letter to her husband with a look of dismay. He was standing with his back to the chimney-piece, his hands thrust far into his pockets, his upper lip quivering. In his happy expansive life this was the sharpest personal rebuff that had ever happened to him. He could not but smart under it.

“Not a word,” he said, tossing his hair back impetuously, as Catherine stood opposite watching him—“not one single word about the miserable people themselves! What kind of stuff can the man be made of?”

“Does he believe you?” asked Catherine, bewildered.

“If not, one must try and make him,” he said energetically, after a moment's pause. “To-morrow, Catherine, I go down to the Hall and see him.”

She quietly acquiesced, and the following afternoon, first thing after luncheon, she watched him go, her tender

inspiring look dwelling with him as he crossed the park, which was lying delicately wrapped in one of the whitest of autumnal mists, the sun just playing through it with pale invading shafts.

The butler looked at him with some doubtfulness. It was never safe to admit visitors for the squire without orders. But he and Robert had special relations. As the possessor of a bass voice worthy of his girth, Vincent, under Robert's rule, had become the pillar of the choir, and it was not easy for him to refuse the rector.

So Robert was led in, through the hall, and down the long passage to the curtained door, which he knew so well.

"Mr. Elsmere, sir!"

There was a sudden hasty movement. Robert passed a magnificent lacquered screen newly placed round the door, and found himself in the squire's presence.

The squire had half risen from his seat in a capacious chair, with a litter of books round it, and confronted his visitor with a look of surprised annoyance. The figure of the rector, tall, thin, and youthful, stood out against the delicate browns and whites of the book-lined walls. The great room, so impressively bare when Robert and Langham had last seen it, was now full of the signs of a busy man's constant habitation. An odour of smoke pervaded it; the table in the window was piled with books just unpacked, and the half-emptied case from which they had been taken lay on the ground beside the squire's chair.

"I persuaded Vincent to admit me, Mr. Wendover," said Robert, advancing hat in hand, while the squire hastily put down the German professor's pipe he had just been enjoying, and coldly accepted his proffered greeting. "I should have preferred not to disturb you without

an appointment, but after your letter it seemed to me some prompt personal explanation was necessary."

The squire stiffly motioned towards a chair, which Robert took, and then slipped back into his own, his wrinkled eyes fixed on the intruder.

Robert, conscious of almost intolerable embarrassment, but maintaining in spite of it an excellent degree of self-control, plunged at once into business. He took the letter he had just received from the squire as a text, made a good-humoured defence of his own proceedings, described his attempt to move Henslowe, and the reluctance of his appeal from the man to the master. The few things he allowed himself to say about Henslowe were in perfect temper, though by no means without an edge.

Then, having disposed of the more personal aspects of the matter, he paused, and looked hesitatingly at the face opposite him, more like a bronzed mask at this moment than a human countenance. The squire, however, gave him no help. He had received his remarks so far in perfect silence, and seeing that there were more to come, he waited for them with the same rigidity of look and attitude.

So, after a moment or two, Robert went on to describe in detail some of those individual cases of hardship and disease at Mile End, during the preceding year, which could be most clearly laid to the sanitary condition of the place. Filth, damp, leaking roofs, foul floors, poisoned water—he traced to each some ghastly human ill, telling his stories with a nervous brevity, a suppressed fire, which would have burnt them into the sense of almost any other listener. Not one of the woes but he and Catherine had tended with sickening pity and labour of body and mind. That side of it he kept rigidly out of sight. But

all that he could hurl against the squire's feeling, as it were, he gathered up, strangely conscious through it all of his own young persistent yearning to right himself with this man, whose mental history, as it lay chronicled in these rooms, had been to him, at a time of intellectual hunger, so stimulating, so enriching.

But passion and reticence and hidden sympathy were alike lost upon the squire. Before he paused Mr. Wendover had already risen restlessly from his chair, and from the rug was glowering down on his unwelcome visitor.

Good heavens! had he come home to be lectured in his own library by this fanatical slip of a parson? As for his stories, the squire barely took the trouble to listen to them.

Every popularity-hunting fool, with a passion for putting his hand into other people's pockets, can tell pathetic stories; but it was intolerable that his scholar's privacy should be at the mercy of one of the tribe.

"Mr. Elsmere," he broke out at last with contemptuous emphasis, "I imagine it would have been better—infininitely better—to have spared both yourself and me the disagreeables of this interview. However, I am not sorry we should understand each other. I have lived a life which is at least double the length of yours in very tolerable peace and comfort. The world has been good enough for me, and I for it, so far. I have been master in my own estate, and intend to remain so. As for the new-fangled ideas of a landowner's duty, with which your mind seems to be full"—the scornful irritation of the tone was unmistakable—"I have never dabbled in them, nor do I intend to begin now. I am like the rest of my kind; I have no money to chuck away in building schemes, in order that the rector of the parish may pose as the

apostle of the agricultural labourer. That, however, is neither here nor there. What is to the purpose is, that my business affairs are in the hands of a business man, deliberately chosen and approved by me, and that I have nothing to do with them. Nothing at all!" he repeated with emphasis. "It may seem to you very shocking. You may regard it as the object in life of the English landowner to inspect the pigstyes and amend the habits of the English labourer. I don't quarrel with the conception, I only ask you not to expect me to live up to it. I am a student first and foremost, and desire to be left to my books. Mr. Henslowe is there on purpose to protect my literary freedom. What he thinks desirable is good enough for me, as I have already informed you. I am sorry for it if his methods do not commend themselves to you. But I have yet to learn that the rector of the parish has an ex-officio right to interfere between a landlord and his tenants."

Robert kept his temper with some difficulty. After a pause he said, feeling desperately, however, that the suggestion was not likely to improve matters,—

"If I were to take all the trouble and all the expense off your hands, Mr. Wendover, would it be impossible for you to authorise me to make one or two alterations most urgently necessary for the improvement of the Mile End cottages?"

The squire burst into an angry laugh.

"I have never yet been in the habit, Mr. Elsmere, of doing my repairs by public subscription. You ask a little too much from an old man's powers of adaptation."

Robert rose from his seat, his hand trembling as it rested on his walking-stick.

"Mr. Wendover," he said, speaking at last with a flash

of answering scorn in his young vibrating voice, "what I think you cannot understand is that at any moment a human creature may sicken and die, poisoned by the state of your property, for which you—and nobody else—are ultimately responsible."

The squire shrugged his shoulders.

"So you say, Mr. Elsmere. If true, every person in such a condition has a remedy in his own hands. I force no one to remain on my property."

"The people who live there," exclaimed Robert, "have neither home nor subsistence if they are driven out. Murewell is full—times bad—most of the people old."

"And eviction 'a sentence of death,' I suppose," interrupted the squire, studying him with sarcastic eyes. "Well, I have no belief in a Gladstonian Ireland, still less in a Radical England. Supply and demand, cause and effect, are enough for me. The Mile End cottages are out of repair, Mr. Elsmere, so Mr. Henslowe tells me, because the site is unsuitable, the type of cottage out of date. People live in them at their peril; I don't pull them down, or rather"—correcting himself with exasperating consistency—"Mr. Henslowe doesn't pull them down, because, like other men, I suppose, he dislikes an outcry. But if the population stays, it stays at its own risk. Now have I made myself plain?"

The two men eyed one another.

"Perfectly plain," said Robert quietly. "Allow me to remind you, Mr. Wendover, that there are other matters than eviction capable of provoking an outcry."

"As you please," said the other indifferently. "I have no doubt I shall find myself in the newspapers before long. If so, I daresay I shall manage to put up with it. Society is made up of fanatics and the creatures

they hunt. If I am to be hunted, I shall be in good company."

Robert stood hat in hand, tormented with a dozen cross-currents of feeling. He was forcibly struck with the blind and comparatively motiveless pugnacity of the squire's conduct. There was an extravagance in it which for the first time recalled to him old Meyrick's lucubrations.

"I have done no good, I see, Mr. Wendover," he said at last, slowly. "I wish I could have induced you to do an act of justice and mercy. I wish I could have made you think more kindly of myself. I have failed in both. It is useless to keep you any longer. Good-morning."

He bowed. The squire also bent forward. At that moment Robert caught sight beside his shoulder of an antique, standing on the mantelpiece, which was a new addition to the room. It was a head of Medusa, and the frightful stony calm of it struck on Elsmere's ruffled nerves with extraordinary force. It flashed across him that here was an apt symbol of that absorbing and overgrown life of the intellect which blights the heart and chills the senses. And to that spiritual Medusa, the man before him was not the first victim he had known.

Possessed with the fancy the young man made his way into the hall. Arrived there, he looked round with a kind of passionate regret: "Shall I ever see this again?" he asked himself. During the past twelve months his pleasure in the great house had been much more than sensuous. Within those walls his mind had grown, had reached to a fuller stature than before, and a man loves, or should love, all that is associated with the maturing of his best self.

He closed the ponderous doors behind him sadly.

The magnificent pile, grander than ever in the sunny autumnal mist which enwrapped it, seemed to look after him as he walked away, mutely wondering that he should have allowed anything so trivial as a peasant's grievance to come between him and its perfections.

In the wooded lane outside the rectory gate he overtook Catherine. He gave her his report, and they walked on together arm-in-arm, a very depressed pair.

"What shall you do next?" she asked him.

"Make out the law of the matter," he said briefly.

"If you get over the inspector," said Catherine anxiously, "I am tolerably certain Henslowe will turn out the people."

He would not dare, Robert thought. At any rate, the law existed for such cases, and it was his bounden duty to call the inspector's attention.

Catherine did not see what good could be done thereby, and feared harm. But her wifely chivalry felt that he must get through his first serious practical trouble his own way. She saw that he felt himself distressingly young and inexperienced, and would not for the world have harrassed him by over-advice.

So she let him alone, and presently Robert threw the matter from him with a sigh.

"Let it be a while," he said, with a shake of his long frame. "I shall get morbid over it if I don't mind. I am a selfish wretch too. I know you have worries of your own, wife."

And he took her hand under the trees and kissed it with a boyish tenderness.

"Yes," said Catherine, sighing, and then paused. "Robert," she burst out again, "I am certain that man

made love of a kind to Rose. *He* will never think of it again, but since the night before last she, to my mind, is simply a changed creature."

"*I* don't see it," said Robert doubtfully.

Catherine looked at him with a little angel scorn in her gray eyes. That men should make their seeing in such matters the measure of the visible!

"You have been studying the squire, sir—I have been studying Rose."

Then she poured out her heart to him, describing the little signs of change and suffering her anxious sense had noted, in spite of Rose's proud effort to keep all the world, but especially Catherine, at arm's length. And at the end her feeling swept her into a denunciation of Langham, which was to Robert like a breath from the past, from those stern hills wherein he met her first. The happiness of their married life had so softened or masked all her ruggedness of character, that there was a certain joy in seeing those strong forces in her which had struck him first reappear.

"Of course I feel myself to blame," he said when she stopped. "But how could one foresee, with such an inveterate hermit and recluse? And I owed him—I owe him—so much."

"I know," said Catherine, but frowning still. It probably seemed to her that that old debt had been more than effaced.

"You will have to send her to Berlin," said Elsmere after a pause. "You must play off her music against this unlucky feeling. If it exists it is your only chance."

"Yes, she must go to Berlin," said Catherine slowly.

Then presently she looked up, a flash of exquisite feeling breaking up the delicate resolution of the face.

"I am not sad about that, Robert. Oh, how you have widened my world for me!"

Suddenly that hour in Marrisdale came back to her. They were in the woodpath. She crept inside her husband's arm and put up her face to him, swept away by an overmastering impulse of self-humiliating love.

The next day Robert walked over to the little market town of Churton, saw the discreet and long-established solicitor of the place, and got from him a complete account of the present state of the rural sanitary law. The first step clearly was to move the sanitary inspector; if that failed for any reason, then any *bonâ fide* inhabitant had an appeal to the local sanitary authority, viz. the board of guardians. Robert walked home pondering his information, and totally ignorant that Henslowe, who was always at Churton on market-days, had been in the market-place at the moment when the rector's tall figure had disappeared within Mr. Dunstan's office-door. That door was unpleasantly known to the agent in connection with some energetic measures for raising money he had been lately under the necessity of employing, and it had a way of attracting his eyes by means of the fascination that often attaches to disagreeable objects.

In the evening Rose was sitting listlessly in the drawing-room. Catherine was not there, so her novel was on her lap and her eyes were staring intently into a world whereof they only had the key. Suddenly there was a ring at the bell. The servant came, and there were several voices and a sound of much shoe-scraping. Then the swing-door leading to the study opened and Elsmere and Catherine came out. Elsmere stopped with an exclamation.

His visitors were two men from Mile End. One was old Milsom, more sallow and palsied than ever. As he

stood bent almost double, his old knotted hand resting for support on the table beside him, everything in the little hall seemed to shake with him. The other was Sharland, the handsome father of the twins, whose wife had been fed by Catherine with every imaginable delicacy since Robert's last visit to the hamlet. Even his strong youth had begun to show signs of premature decay. The rolling gipsy eyes were growing sunken, the limbs dragged a little.

They had come to implore the rector to let Mile End alone. Henslowe had been over there in the afternoon, and had given them all very plainly to understand that if Mr. Elsmere meddled any more they would be all turned out at a week's notice to shift as they could. "And if you don't find Thurston Common nice lying this weather, with the winter coming on, you'll know who to thank for it," the agent had flung behind him as he rode off.

Robert turned white. Rose, watching the little scene with listless eyes, saw him towering over the group like an embodiment of wrath and pity.

"If they turn us out, sir," said old Milsom, wistfully looking up at Elsmere with bleary eyes, "there'll be nothing left but the House for us old 'uns. Why, lor' bless you, sir, it's not so bad but we can make shift."

"You, Milsom!" cried Robert; "and you've just all but lost your grandchild! And you know your wife 'll never be the same woman since that bout of fever in the spring. And——"

His quick eyes ran over the old man's broken frame with a world of indignant meaning in them.

"Ay, ay, sir," said Milsom, unmoved. "But if it isn't fevers, it's summat else. I can make a shilling or two where

I be, speshally in the first part of the year, in the basket work, and my wife she goes charring up at Mr. Carter's farm, and Mr. Dodson, him at the farther farm, he do give us a bit sometimes. Ef you git us turned away it will be a bad day's work for all on us, sir, you may take my word on it."

"And my wife so ill, Mr. Elsmere," said Sharland, "and all those childer! I can't walk three miles farther to my work, Mr. Elsmere, I can't nohow. I haven't got the legs for it. Let un be, sir. We'll rub along."

Robert tried to argue the matter.

If they would but stand by him he would fight the matter through, and they should not suffer, if he had to get up a public subscription, or support them out of his own pocket all the winter. A bold front, and Mr. Henslowe must give way. The law was on their side, and every labourer in Surrey would be the better off for their refusal to be housed like pigs and poisoned like vermin.

In vain. There is an inexhaustible store of cautious endurance in the poor against which the keenest reformer constantly throws himself in vain. Elsmere was beaten. The two men got his word, and shuffled off back to their pestilential hovels, a pathetic content beaming on each face.

Catherine and Robert went back into the study. Rose heard her brother-in-law's passionate sigh as the door swung behind them.

"Defeated!" she said to herself with a curious accent. "Well, everybody must have his turn. Robert has been too successful in his life, I think.—You wretch!" she added, after a minute, laying her bright head down on the book before her.

Next morning his wife found Elsmere after breakfast busily packing a case of books in the study. They were

books from the Hall library, which so far had been for months the inseparable companions of his historical work.

Catherine stood and watched him sadly.

"Must you, Robert?"

"I won't be beholden to that man for anything an hour longer than I can help," he answered her.

When the packing was nearly finished he came up to where she stood in the open window.

"Things won't be as easy for us in the future, darling," he said to her. "A rector with both squire and agent against him is rather heavily handicapped. We must make up our minds to that."

"I have no great fear," she said, looking at him proudly.

"Oh, well—nor I—perhaps," he admitted, after a moment. "We can hold our own. But I wish—oh, I wish"—and he laid his hand on his wife's shoulder—"I could have made friends with the squire."

Catherine looked less responsive.

"As squire, Robert, or as Mr. Wendover?"

"As both, of course, but specially as Mr. Wendover."

"We can do without his friendship," she said with energy.

Robert gave a great stretch, as though to work off his regrets.

"Ah, but," he said, half to himself, as his arms dropped, "if you are just filled with the hunger to *know*, the people who know as much as the squire become very interesting to you!"

Catherine did not answer. But probably her heart went out once more in protest against a knowledge that was to her but a form of revolt against the awful powers of man's destiny.

"However, here go his books," said Robert.

Two days later Mrs. Leyburn and Agnes made their appearance, Mrs. Leyburn all in a flutter concerning the event over which, in her own opinion, she had come to preside. In her gentle fluid mind all impressions were short-lived. She had forgotten how she had brought up her own babies, but Mrs. Thornburgh who had never had any, had filled her full of nursery lore. She sat retailing a host of second-hand hints and instructions to Catherine, who would every now and then lay her hand smiling on her mother's knee, well pleased to see the flush of pleasure on the pretty old face, and ready, in her patient filial way, to let herself be experimented on to the utmost, if it did but make the poor foolish thing happy.

Then came a night when every soul in the quiet rectory, even hot, smarting Rose, was possessed by one thought through many terrible hours, and one only—the thought of Catherine's safety. It was strange and unexpected, but Catherine, the most normal and healthy of women, had a hard struggle for her own life and her child's, and it was not till the gray autumn morning, after a day and night which left a permanent mark on Robert, that he was summoned at last, and with the sense of one emerging from black gulfs of terror, received from his wife's languid hand the tiny fingers of his firstborn.

The days that followed were full of emotion for these two people, who were perhaps always over-serious, over-sensitive. They had no idea of minimising the great common experiences of life. Both of them were really simple, brought up in old-fashioned simple ways, easily touched, responsive to all that high spiritual education which flows from the familiar incidents of the human story, approached poetically and passionately. As the

young husband sat in the quiet of his wife's room, the occasional restless movements of the small brown head against her breast causing the only sound perceptible in the country silence, he felt all the deep familiar currents of human feeling sweeping through him—love, reverence, thanksgiving—and all the walls of the soul, as it were, expanding and enlarging as they passed.

Responsive creature that he was, the experience of these days was hardly happiness. It went too deep; it brought him too poignantly near to all that is most real and therefore most tragic in life.

Catherine's recovery also was slower than might have been expected, considering her constitutional soundness, and for the first week, after that faint moment of joy when her child was laid upon her arm, and she saw her husband's quivering face above her, there was a kind of depression hovering over her. Robert felt it, and felt too that all his devotion could not soothe it away. At last she said to him one evening, in the encroaching September twilight, speaking with a sudden hurrying vehemence, wholly unlike herself, as though a barrier of reserve had given way,—

“Robert, I cannot put it out of my head. I cannot forget it, *the pain of the world!*”

He shut the book he was reading, her hand in his, and bent over her with questioning eyes.

“It seems,” she went on, with that difficulty which a strong nature always feels in self-revelation, “to take the joy even out of our love—and the child. I feel ashamed almost that mere physical pain should have laid such hold on me—and yet I can't get away from it. It's not for myself,” and she smiled faintly at him. “Comparatively I had so little to bear! But I know now for the

first time what physical pain may mean—and I never knew before! I lie thinking, Robert, about all creatures in pain—workmen crushed by machinery, or soldiers—or poor things in hospitals—above all of women! Oh, when I get well, how I will take care of the women here! What women must suffer even here in out-of-the-way cottages—no doctor, no kind nursing, all blind agony and struggle! And women in London in dens like those Mr. Newcome got into, degraded, forsaken, ill-treated, the thought of the child only an extra horror and burden! And the pain all the time so merciless, so cruel—no escape! Oh, to give all one is, or ever can be, to comforting! And yet the great sea of it one can never touch! It is a nightmare—I am weak still, I suppose; I don't know myself; but I can see nothing but jarred, tortured creatures everywhere. All my own joys and comforts seem to lift me selfishly above the common lot."

She stopped, her large gray-blue eyes dim with tears, trying once more for that habitual self-restraint which physical weakness had shaken.

"You *are* weak," he said, caressing her, "and that destroys for a time the normal balance of things. It is true, darling, but we are not meant to see it always so clearly. God knows we could not bear it if we did."

"And to think," she said, shuddering a little, "that there are men and women who in the face of it can still refuse Christ and the Cross, can still say this life is all! How can they live—how dare they live?"

Then he saw that not only man's pain, but man's defiance, had been haunting her, and he guessed what persons and memories had been flitting through her mind. But he dared not talk lest she should exhaust herself. Presently, seeing a volume of Augustine's *Confessions*, her

favourite book, lying beside her, he took it up, turning over the pages, and weaving passages together as they caught his eye.

“Speak to me, for Thy compassion’s sake, O Lord my God, and tell me what art Thou to me! Say unto my soul, ‘I am thy salvation!’ Speak it that I may hear. Behold the ears of my heart, O Lord; open them and say unto my soul, ‘I am thy salvation!’ I will follow after this voice of Thine, I will lay hold on Thee. The temple of my soul, wherein Thou shouldest enter, is narrow, do Thou enlarge it. It falleth into ruins—do Thou rebuild it! . . . Woe to that bold soul which hopeth, if it do but let Thee go, to find something better than Thee! It turneth hither and thither, on this side and on that, and all things are hard and bitter unto it. For Thou only art rest! . . . Whithersoever the soul of man turneth it findeth sorrow, except only in Thee. Fix there, then, thy resting-place, my soul! Lay up in Him whatever thou hast received from Him. Commend to the keeping of the Truth whatever the Truth hath given thee, and thou shalt lose nothing. And thy dead things shall revive and thy weak things shall be made whole!”

She listened, appropriating and clinging to every word, till the nervous clasp of the long delicate fingers relaxed, her head dropped a little, gently, against the head of the child, and tired with much feeling she slept.

Robert slipped away and strolled out into the garden in the fast-gathering darkness. His mind was full of that intense spiritual life of Catherine’s which in its wonderful self-containedness and strength was always a marvel, sometimes a reproach, to him. Beside her, he seemed to himself a light creature, drawn hither and thither by this interest and by that, tangled in the fleet-

ing shows of things—the toy and plaything of circumstance. He thought ruefully and humbly, as he wandered on through the dusk, of his own lack of inwardness: “Everything divides me from Thee!” he could have cried in St. Augustine’s manner. “Books, and friends, and work—all seem to hide Thee from me. Why am I so passionate for this and that, for all these sections and fragments of Thee? Oh, for the One, the All! Fix there thy resting-place, my soul!”

And presently, after this cry of self-reproach, he turned to muse on that intuition of the world’s pain which had been troubling Catherine, shrinking from it even more than she had shrunk from it, in proportion as his nature was more imaginative than hers. And Christ the only clue, the only remedy—no other anywhere in this vast universe, where all men are under sentence of death, where the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now!

And yet what countless generations of men had borne their pain, knowing nothing of the one Healer. He thought of Buddhist patience and Buddhist charity; of the long centuries during which Chaldean or Persian or Egyptian lived, suffered, and died, trusting the gods they knew. And how many other generations, nominally children of the Great Hope, had used it as the mere instrument of passion or of hate, cursing in the name of love, destroying in the name of pity! For how much of the world’s pain was not Christianity itself responsible? His thoughts recurred with a kind of anguished perplexity to some of the problems stirred in him of late by his historical reading. The strifes and feuds and violences of the early Church returned to weigh upon him—the hair-splitting superstition, the selfish passion

for power. He recalled Gibbon's lamentation over the age of the Antonines, and Mommsen's grave doubt whether, taken as a whole, the area once covered by the Roman Empire can be said to be substantially happier now than in the days of Severus.

O corruptio optimi! That men should have been so little affected by that shining ideal of the New Jerusalem, "descended out of Heaven from God," into their very midst—that the print of the "blessed feet" along the world's highway should have been so often buried in the sands of cruelty and fraud!

The September wind blew about him as he strolled through the darkening column, set thick with great bushes of sombre juniper among the yellowing fern, which stretched away on the left-hand side of the road leading to the Hall. He stood and watched the masses of restless discordant cloud which the sunset had left behind it, thinking the while of Mr. Grey, of his assertions and his denials. Certain phrases of his which Robert had heard drop from him on one or two rare occasions during the later stages of his Oxford life ran through his head.

"*The fairy-tale of Christianity*"—"The origins of *Christian Mythology*." He could recall, as the words rose in his memory, the simplicity of the rugged face, and the melancholy mingled with fire which had always marked the great tutor's sayings about religion.

"*Fairy Tale!*" Could any reasonable man watch a life like Catherine's and believe that nothing but a delusion lay at the heart of it? And as he asked the question, he seemed to hear Mr. Grey's answer: "All religions are true, and all are false. In them all, more or less visibly, man grasps at the one thing needful—self

forsaken, God laid hold of. The spirit in them all is the same, answers eternally to reality; it is but the letter, the fashion, the imagery, that are relative and changing."

He turned and walked homeward, struggling, with a host of tempestuous ideas as swift and varying as the autumn clouds hurrying overhead. And then, through a break in a line of trees, he caught sight of the tower and chancel window of the little church. In an instant he had a vision of early summer mornings—dewy, perfumed, silent, save for the birds, and all the soft stir of rural birth and growth, of a chancel fragrant with many flowers, of a distant church with scattered figures, of the kneeling form of his wife close beside him, himself bending over her, the sacrament of the Lord's death in his hand. The emotion, the intensity, the absolute self-surrender of innumerable such moments in the past—moments of a common faith, a common self-abasement—came flooding back upon him. With a movement of joy and penitence he threw himself at the feet of Catherine's Master and his own: "*Fix there thy resting-place, my soul!*"

CHAPTER XX.

CATHERINE'S later convalescence dwelt in her mind in after years as a time of peculiar softness and peace. Her baby-girl thrived; Robert had driven the squire and Henslowe out of his mind, and was all eagerness as to certain negotiations with a famous naturalist for a lecture at the village club. At Mile End, as though to put the rector in the wrong, serious illness had for the time disappeared; and Mrs. Leyburn's mild chatter, as she gently

poked about the house and garden, went out in Catherine's pony-carriage, inspected Catherine's stores, and hovered over Catherine's babe, had a constantly cheering effect on the still languid mother. Like all theorists, especially those at second-hand, Mrs. Leyburn's maxims had been very much routed by the event. The babe had ailments she did not understand, or it developed likes and dislikes she had forgotten existed in babies, and Mrs. Leyburn was nonplussed. She would sit with it on her lap, anxiously studying its peculiarities. She was sure it squinted, that its back was weaker than other babies', that it cried more than hers had ever done. She loved to be plaintive; it would have seemed to her unladylike to be too cheerful, even over a first grandchild.

Agnes meanwhile made herself practically useful, as was her way, and she did almost more than anybody to beguile Catherine's recovery by her hours of Long Whindale chat. She had no passionate feeling about the place and the people as Catherine had, but she was easily content, and she had a good wholesome feminine curiosity as to the courtings and weddings and burials of the human beings about her. So she would sit and chat, working the while with the quickest, neatest of fingers, till Catherine knew as much about Jenny Tyson's Whinborough lover, and Farmer Tredall's troubles with his son, and the way in which that odious woman Molly Redgold bullied her little consumptive husband, as Agnes knew, which was saying a good deal.

About themselves Agnes was frankness itself.

"Since you went," she would say with a shrug, "I keep the coach steady, perhaps, but Rose drives, and we shall have to go where she takes us. By the way, Cathie, what have you been doing to her here? She is not a bit

like herself. I don't generally mind being snubbed. It amuses her and doesn't hurt me; and, of course, I know I am meant to be her foil. But, really, sometimes she is too bad even for me."

Catherine sighed, but held her peace. Like all strong persons, she kept things very much to herself. It only made vexations more real to talk about them. But she and Agnes discussed the winter and Berlin.

"You had better let her go," said Agnes significantly; "she will go anyhow."

A few days afterwards Catherine, opening the drawing-room door unexpectedly, came upon Rose sitting idly at the piano, her hands resting on the keys, and her great gray eyes straining out of her white face with an expression which sent the sister's heart into her shoes.

"How you steal about, Catherine!" cried the player, getting up and shutting the piano. "I declare you are just like Millais's Gray Lady in that ghostly gown."

Catherine came swiftly across the floor. She had just left her child, and the sweet dignity of motherhood was in her step, her look. She came and threw her arms round the girl.

"Rose, dear, I have settled it all with mamma. The money can be managed, and you shall go to Berlin for the winter when you like."

She drew herself back a little, still with her arms round Rose's waist, and looked at her smiling, to see how she took it.

Rose had a strange movement of irritation. She drew herself out of Catherine's grasp.

"I don't know that I had settled on Berlin," she said coldly. "Very possibly Leipsic would be better."

Catherine's face fell.

"Whichever you like, dear. I have been thinking about it ever since that day you spoke of it—you remember—and now I have talked it over with mamma. If she can't manage all the expense we will help. Oh, Rose," and she came nearer again, timidly, her eyes melting, "I know we haven't understood each other. I have been ignorant, I think, and narrow. But I meant it for the best, dear—I did——"

Her voice failed her, but in her look there seemed to be written the history of all the prayers and yearnings of her youth over the pretty wayward child who had been her joy and torment. Rose could not but meet that look—its nobleness, its humble surrender.

Suddenly two large tears rolled down her cheeks. She dashed them away impatiently.

"I am not a bit well," she said, as though in irritable excuse both to herself and Catherine. "I believe I have had a headache for a fortnight."

And then she put her arms down on a table near and hid her face upon them. She was one bundle of jarring nerves—sore, poor passionate child, that she was betraying herself; sorer still that, as she told herself, Catherine was sending her to Berlin as a consolation. When girls have love-troubles the first thing their elders do is to look for a diversion. She felt sick and humiliated. Catherine had been talking her over with the family, she supposed.

Meanwhile Catherine stood by her tenderly, stroking her hair and saying soothing things.

"I am sure you will be happy at Berlin, Rose. And you mustn't leave me out of your life, dear, though I am so stupid and unmusical. You must write to me about all you do. We must begin a new time. Oh, I feel so

guilty sometimes," she went on, falling into a low intensity of voice that startled Rose, and made her look hurriedly up. "I fought against your music, I suppose, because I thought it was devouring you—leaving no room for—for religion—for God. I was jealous of it for Christ's sake. And all the time I was blundering! Oh, Rose," and she sank on her knees beside the chair, resting her head against the girl's shoulder, "papa charged me to make you love God, and I torture myself with thinking that, instead, it has been my doing, my foolish clumsy doing, that you have come to think religion dull and hard. Oh, my darling, if I could make amends—if I could get you not to love your art less but to love it in God! Christ is the first reality; all things else are real and lovely in Him. Oh, I have been frightening you away from Him! I ought to have drawn you near. I have been so—so silent, so shut up, I have never tried to make you feel what it was kept *me* at His feet! Oh, Rose, darling, you think the world real, and pleasure and enjoyment real. But if I could have made you see and know the things I have seen up in the mountains—among the poor, the dying—you would have *felt* Him saving, redeeming, interceding, as I did. Oh, then you *must*, you *would* have known that Christ only is real, that our joys can only truly exist in Him. I should have been more open—more faithful—more humble."

She paused with a long quivering sigh. Rose suddenly lifted herself, and they fell into each other's arms.

Rose, shaken and excited, thought, of course, of that night at Burwood, when she had won leave to go to Manchester. This scene was the sequel to that—the next stage in one and the same process. Her feeling was much the same as that of the naturalist who comes close

to any of the hidden operations of life. She had come near to Catherine's spirit in the growing. Beside that sweet expansion, how poor and feverish and earth-stained the poor child felt herself!

But there were many currents in Rose—many things striving for the mastery. She kissed Catherine once or twice, then she drew herself back suddenly, looking into the other's face. A great wave of feeling rushed up and broke.

"Catherine, could you ever have married a man that did not believe in Christ?"

She flung the question out—a kind of morbid curiosity, a wild wish to find an outlet of some sort for things pent up in her, driving her on.

Catherine started. But she met Rose's half-frowning eyes steadily.

"Never, Rose! To me it would not be marriage."

The child's face lost its softness. She drew one hand away.

"What have we to do with it?" she cried. "Each one for himself."

"But marriage makes two one," said Catherine, pale, but with a firm clearness. "And if husband and wife are only one in body and estate, not one in soul, why, who that believes in the soul would accept such a bond, endure such a miserable second best?"

She rose. But though her voice had recovered all its energy, her attitude, her look was still tenderness, still yearning itself.

"Religion does not fill up the soul," said Rose slowly. Then she added carelessly, a passionate red flying into her cheek against her will, "However, I cannot imagine any question that interests me personally less. I was curious what you would say."

And she too got up, drawing her hand lightly along the keyboard of the piano. Her pose had a kind of defiance in it; her knit brows forbade Catherine to ask questions. Catherine stood irresolute. Should she throw herself on her sister, imploring her to speak, opening her own heart on the subject of this wild unhappy fancy for a man who would never think again of the child he had played with?

But the North-country dread of words, of speech that only defines and magnifies, prevailed. Let there be no words, but let her love and watch.

So, after a moment's pause, she began in a different tone upon the inquiries she had been making, the arrangements that would be wanted for this musical winter. Rose was almost listless at first. A stranger would have thought she was being persuaded into something against her will. But she could not keep it up. The natural instinct reasserted itself, and she was soon planning and deciding as sharply, and with as much young omniscience, as usual.

By the evening it was settled. Mrs. Leyburn, much bewildered, asked Catherine doubtfully, the last thing at night, whether she wanted Rose to be a professional. Catherine exclaimed.

"But, my dear," said the widow, staring pensively into her bedroom fire, "what's she to do with all this music?" Then after a second she added half severely: "I don't believe her father would have liked it; I don't, indeed, Catherine!"

Poor Catherine smiled and sighed in the background, but made no reply.

"However, she never looks so pretty as when she's playing the violin—never!" said Mrs. Leyburn presently

in the distance, with a long breath of satisfaction. "She's got such a lovely hand and arm, Catherine! They're prettier than mine, and even your father used to notice mine."

"*Even.*" The word had a little sound of bitterness. In spite of all his love, had the gentle puzzle-headed woman found her unearthly husband often very hard to live with?

Rose meanwhile was sitting up in bed, with her hands round her knees, dreaming. So she had got her heart's desire! There did not seem to be much joy in the getting, but that was the way of things, one was told. She knew she should hate the Germans—great, bouncing, over-fed, sentimental creatures!

Then her thoughts ran into the future. After six months—yes, by April—she would be home, and Agnes and her mother could meet her in London.

London. Ah, it was London she was thinking of all the time, not Berlin! She could not stay in the present; or rather the Rose of the present went straining to the Rose of the future, asking to be righted, to be avenged.

"I will learn—I will learn fast—many things besides music!" she said to herself feverishly. "By April I shall be *much* cleverer. Oh, *then* I won't be a fool so easily. We shall be sure to meet, of course. But he shall find out that it was only a *child*, only a silly soft-hearted baby he played with down here. I shan't care for him in the least, of course not, not after six months. I don't *mean* to. And I will make him know it—oh, I will, though he is so wise, and so much older, and mounts on such stilts when he pleases!"

So once more Rose flung her defiance at fate. But when Catherine came along the passage an hour later she

heard low sounds from Rose's room, which ceased abruptly as her step drew near. The elder sister paused; her eyes filled with tears; her hand closed indignantly. Then she came closer, all but went in, thought better of it, and moved away. If there is any truth in brain-waves, Langham should have slept restlessly that night.

Ten days later an escort had been found, all preparations had been made, and Rose was gone.

Mrs. Leyburn and Agnes lingered a while, and then they too departed under an engagement to come back after Christmas for a long stay, that Mrs. Leyburn might cheat the northern spring a little.

So husband and wife were alone again. How they relished their solitude! Catherine took up many threads of work which her months of comparative weakness had forced her to let drop. She taught vigorously in the school; in the afternoons, so far as her child would let her, she carried her tender presence and her practical knowledge of nursing to the sick and feeble; and on two evenings in the week she and Robert threw open a little room there was on the ground-floor between the study and the dining-room to the women and girls of the village, as a sort of drawing-room. Hard-worked mothers would come, who had put their fretful babes to sleep, and given their lords to eat, and had just energy left, while the eldest daughter watched, and the men were at the club or the "Blue Boar," to put on a clean apron and climb the short hill to the rectory. Once there, there was nothing to think of for an hour but the bright room, Catherine's kind face, the rector's jokes, and the illustrated papers or the photographs that were spread out for them to look at if they would. The girls learned to come,

because Catherine could teach them a simple dressmaking, and was clever in catching stray persons to set them singing; and because Mr. Elsmere read exciting stories, and because nothing any one of them ever told Mrs. Elsmere was forgotten by her, or failed to interest her. Any of her social equals of the neighbourhood would have hardly recognised the reserved and stately Catherine on these occasions. Here she felt herself at home, at ease. She would never, indeed, have Robert's pliancy, his quick divination, and for some time after her transplanting the North-country woman had found it very difficult to suit herself to a new shade of local character. But she was learning from Robert every day; she watched him among the poor, recognising all his gifts with a humble intensity of admiring love, which said little but treasured everything, and for herself her inward happiness and peace shone through her quiet ways, making her the mother and the friend of all about her.

As for Robert, he, of course, was living at high pressure all round. Outside his sermons and his school, his Natural History Club had perhaps most of his heart, and the passion for science, little continuous work as he was able to give it, grew on him more and more. He kept up as best he could, working with one hand, so to speak, when he could not spare two, and in his long rambles over moor and hill, gathering in with his quick eye a harvest of local fact wherewith to feed their knowledge and his own.

The mornings he always spent at work among his books, the afternoons in endless tramps over the parish, sometimes alone, sometimes with Catherine; and in the evenings, if Catherine was "at home," twice a week to womankind, he had his nights when his study became

the haunt and prey of half the boys in the place, who were free of everything, as soon as he had taught them to respect his books, and not to taste his medicines; other nights when he was lecturing or story-telling in the club or in some outlying hamlet; or others again, when with Catherine beside him he would sit trying to think some of that religious passion which burned in both their hearts, into clear words or striking illustrations for his sermons.

Then his choir was much upon his mind. He knew nothing about music, nor did Catherine; their efforts made Rose laugh irreverently when she got their letters at Berlin. But Robert believed in a choir chiefly as an excellent social and centralising instrument. There had been none in Mr. Preston's day. He was determined to have one, and a good one, and by sheer energy he succeeded, delighting in his boyish way over the opposition some of his novelties excited among the older and more stiff-backed inhabitants.

"Let them talk," he would say brightly to Catherine. "They will come round; and talk is good. Anything to make them think, to stir the pool!"

Of course that old problem of the agricultural labourer weighed upon him—his grievances, his wants. He went about pondering the English land system, more than half inclined one day to sink part of his capital in a peasant-proprietor experiment, and ingulfed the next in all the moral and economical objections to the French system. Land for allotments, at any rate, he had set his heart on. But in this direction, as in many others, the way was barred. All the land in the parish was the squire's, and not one inch of the squire's land would Henslowe let young Elsmere have anything to do with if he knew it.

He would neither repair nor enlarge the Workmen's Institute; and he had a way of forgetting the squire's customary subscriptions to parochial objects, always paid through him, which gave him much food for chuckling whenever he passed Elsmere in the country lanes. The man's coarse insolence and mean hatred made themselves felt at every turn, besmirching and embittering.

Still it was very true that neither Henslowe nor the squire could do Robert much harm. His hold on the parish was visibly strengthening; his sermons were not only filling the church with his own parishioners, but attracting hearers from the districts round Murewell, so that even on these winter Sundays there was almost always a sprinkling of strange faces among the congregation; and his position in the county and diocese was becoming every month more honourable and important. The gentry about showed them much kindness, and would have shown them much hospitality if they had been allowed. But though Robert had nothing of the ascetic about him, and liked the society of his equals as much as most good-tempered and vivacious people do, he and Catherine decided that for the present they had no time to spare for visits and county society. Still, of course, there were many occasions on which the routine of their life brought them across their neighbours, and it began to be pretty widely recognised that Elsmere was a young fellow of unusual promise and intelligence, that his wife too was remarkable, and that between them they were likely to raise the standard of clerical effort considerably in their part of Surrey.

All the factors of this life—his work, his influence, his recovered health, the lavish beauty of the country, Elsmere enjoyed with all his heart. But at the root of

all there lay what gave value and savour to everything else—that exquisite homelife of theirs, that tender, triple bond of husband, wife, and child.

Catherine, coming home tired from teaching or visiting, would find her step quickening as she reached the gate of the rectory, and the sense of delicious possession waking up in her, which is one of the first fruits of motherhood. There, at the window, between the lamp-light behind and the winter dusk outside, would be the child in its nurse's arms, little, wondering motiveless smiles passing over the tiny puckered face that was so oddly like Robert already. And afterwards, in the fire-lit nursery, with the bath in front of the high fender, and all the necessities of baby life beside it, she would go through those functions which mothers love and linger over, let the kicking dimpled creature principally concerned protest as it may against the over-refinements of civilisation. Then, when the little restless voice was stilled, and the cradle left silent in the darkened room, there would come the short watching for Robert, his voice, his kiss, their simple meal together, a moment of rest, of laughter and chat, before some fresh effort claimed them. Every now and then—white-letter days—there would drop on them a long evening together. Then out would come one of the few books—Dante or Virgil or Milton—which had entered into the fibre of Catherine's strong nature. The two heads would draw close over them, or Robert would take some thought of hers as a text, and spout away from the hearthrug, watching all the while for her smile, her look of assent. Sometimes, late at night, when there was a sermon on his mind, he would dive into his pocket for his Greek Testament and make her read, partly for the sake of teaching her—for she

knew some Greek and longed to know more—but mostly that he might get from her some of that garnered wealth of spiritual experience which he adored in her. They would go from verse to verse, from thought to thought, till suddenly perhaps the tide of feeling would rise, and while the wind swept round the house, and the owls hooted in the elms, they would sit hand in hand, lost in love and faith,—Christ near them—Eternity, warm with God, enwrapping them.

So much for the man of action, the husband, the philanthropist. In reality, great as was the moral energy of this period of Elsmere's life, the dominant distinguishing note of it was not moral but intellectual.

In matters of conduct he was but developing habits and tendencies already strongly present in him; in matters of thinking, with every month of this winter he was becoming conscious of fresh forces, fresh hunger, fresh horizons.

"One half of your day be the king of your world," Mr. Grey had said to him; *"the other half be the slave of something which will take you out of your world, into the general life, the life of thought, of man as a whole, of the universe."*

The counsel, as we have seen, had struck root and flowered into action. So many men of Elsmere's type give themselves up once and for all as they become mature to the life of doing and feeling, practically excluding the life of thought. It was Henry Grey's influence in all probability, perhaps, too, the training of an earlier Langham, that saved for Elsmere the life of thought.

The form taken by this training of his own mind he had been thus encouraged not to abandon, was, as we

know, the study of history. He had well mapped out before him that book on the origins of France which he had described to Langham. It was to take him years, of course, and meanwhile, in his first enthusiasm, he was like a child, revelling in the treasure of work that lay before him. As he had told Langham, he had just got below the surface of a great subject and was beginning to dig into the roots of it. Hitherto he had been under the guidance of men of his own day, of the nineteenth century historian, who refashions the past on the lines of his own mind, who gives it rationality, coherence, and, as it were, modernness, so that the main impression he produces on us, so long as we look at that past through him only, is on the whole an impression of *continuity*, of *resemblance*.

Whereas, on the contrary, the first impression left on a man by the attempt to plunge into the materials of history for himself is almost always an extraordinarily sharp impression of *difference*, of *contrast*. Ultimately, of course, he sees that these men and women whose letters and biographies, whose creeds and general conceptions he is investigating, are in truth his ancestors, bone of his bone, flesh of his flesh. But at first the student who goes back, say, in the history of Europe, behind the Renaissance or behind the Crusades into the actual deposits of the past, is often struck with a kind of *vertige*. The men and women whom he has dragged forth into the light of his own mind are to him like some strange puppet-show. They are called by names he knows—kings, bishops, judges, poets, priests, men of letters—but what a gulf between him and them! What motives, what beliefs, what embryonic processes of thought and morals, what bizarre combinations of ignorance and knowledge,

of the highest sanctity with the lowest credulity or falsehood; what extraordinary prepossessions, born with a man and tainting his whole ways of seeing and thinking from childhood to the grave! Amid all the intellectual dislocation of the spectacle, indeed, he perceives certain Greeks and certain Latins who represent a forward strain, who belong as it seems to a world of their own, a world ahead of them. To them he stretches out his hand: "*You*," he says to them, "though your priests spoke to you not of Christ, but of Zeus and Artemis, *you* are really my kindred!" But intellectually they stand alone. Around them, after them, for long ages the world "spake as a child, felt as a child, understood as a child."

Then he sees what it is makes the difference, digs the gulf. "*Science*," the mind cries, "*ordered knowledge*." And so for the first time the modern recognises what the accumulations of his forefathers have done for him. He takes the torch which man has been so long and patiently fashioning to his hand, and turns it on the past, and at every step the sight grows stranger, and yet more moving, more pathetic. The darkness into which he penetrates does but make him grasp his own guiding light the more closely. And yet, bit by bit, it has been prepared for him by these groping half-conscious generations, and the scrutiny which began in repulsion and laughter ends in a marvelling gratitude.

But the repulsion and the laughter come first, and during this winter of work Elsmere felt them both very strongly. He would sit in the morning buried among the records of decaying Rome and emerging France, surrounded by Chronicles, by Church Councils, by lives of the Saints, by primitive systems of law, pushing his imaginative impetuous way through them. Sometimes

Catherine would be there, and he would pour out on her something of what was in his own mind.

One day he was deep in the life of a certain saint. The saint had been bishop of a diocese in Southern France. His biographer was his successor in the see, a man of high political importance in the Burgundian state, renowned besides for sanctity and learning. Only some twenty years separated the biography, at the latest, from the death of its subject. It contained some curious material for social history, and Robert was reading it with avidity. But it was, of course, a tissue of marvels. The young bishop had practised every virtue known to the time, and wrought every conceivable miracle, and the miracles were better told than usual, with more ingenuity, more imagination. Perhaps on that account they struck the reader's sense more sharply.

"And the saint said to the sorcerers and to the practisers of unholy arts, that they should do those evil things no more, for he had bound the spirits of whom they were wont to inquire, and they would get no further answers to their incantations. Then those stiff-necked sons of the devil fell upon the man of God, scourged him sore, and threatened him with death, if he would not instantly loose those spirits he had bound. And seeing he could prevail nothing, and being, moreover, admonished by God so to do, he permitted them to work their own damnation. For he called for a parchment and wrote upon it, '*Ambrose unto Satan—Enter!*' Then was the spell loosed, the spirits returned, the sorcerers inquired as they were accustomed, and received answers. But in a short space of time every one of them perished miserably and was delivered unto his natural lord Satanas, whereunto he belonged."

Robert made a hasty exclamation, and turning to Catherine, who was working beside him, read the passage to her, with a few words as to the book and its author.

Catherine's work dropped a moment on to her knee.

"What extraordinary superstition!" she said, startled. "A bishop, Robert, and an educated man?"

Robert nodded.

"But it is the whole habit of mind," he said half to himself, staring into the fire, "that is so astounding. No one escapes it. The whole age really is non-sane."

"I suppose the devout Catholic would believe that?"

"I am not sure," said Robert dreamily, and remained sunk in thought for long after, while Catherine worked, and pondered a Christmas entertainment for her girls.

Perhaps it was his scientific work, fragmentary as it was, that was really quickening and sharpening these historical impressions of his. Evolution—once a mere germ in the mind—was beginning to press, to encroach, to intermeddle with the mind's other furniture.

And the comparative instinct—that tool, *par excellence*, of modern science—was at last fully awake, was growing fast, taking hold, now here, now there.

"It is tolerably clear to me," he said to himself suddenly one winter afternoon, as he was trudging home alone from Mile End, "that some day or other I must set to work to bring a little order into one's notions of the Old Testament. At present they are just a chaos!"

He walked on a while, struggling with the rainstorm which had overtaken him, till again the mind's quick life took voice.

"But what matter? God in the beginning—God in the prophets—in Israel's best life—God in Christ! How are any theories about the Pentateuch to touch that?"

And into the clear eyes, the young face aglow with wind and rain, there leapt a light, a softness indescribable.

But the vivider and the keener grew this new mental life of Elsmere's, the more constant became his sense of soreness as to that foolish and motiveless quarrel which divided him from the squire. Naturally he was for ever being harassed and pulled up in his work by the mere loss of the Murewell library. To have such a collection so close, and to be cut off from it, was a state of things no student could help feeling severely. But it was much more than that: it was the man he hankered after; the man who was a master where he was a beginner; the man who had given his life to learning, and was carrying all his vast accumulations sombrely to the grave, unused, untransmitted.

"He might have given me his knowledge," thought Elsmere sadly, "and I—I—would have been a son to him. Why is life so perverse?"

Meanwhile he was as much cut off from the great house and its master as though both had been surrounded by the thorn hedge of fairy tale. The Hall had its visitors during these winter months, but the Elsmeres saw nothing of them. Robert gulped down a natural sigh when one Saturday evening, as he passed the Hall gates, he saw driving through them the chief of English science side by side with the most accomplished of English critics.

"There are good times in the world and I ain't in 'em!" he said to himself with a laugh and a shrug as he turned up the lane to the rectory, and then, boy-like,

was ashamed of himself, and greeted Catherine with all the tenderer greeting.

Only on two occasions during three months could he be sure of having seen the squire. Both were in the twilight, when, as the neighbourhood declared, Mr. Wendover always walked, and both made a sharp impression on the rector's nerves. In the heart of one of the loneliest commons of the parish Robert, swinging along one November evening through the scattered furze bushes, growing ghostly in the darkness, was suddenly conscious of a cloaked figure with slouching shoulders and head bent forward coming towards him. It passed without recognition of any kind, and for an instant Robert caught the long sharpened features and haughty eyes of the squire.

At another time Robert was walking, far from home, along a bit of level road. The pools in the ruts were just filmed with frost, and gleamed under the sunset; the winter dusk was clear and chill. A horseman turned into the road from a side lane. It was the squire again, alone. The sharp sound of the approaching hoofs stirred Robert's pulse, and as they passed each other the rector raised his hat. He thought his greeting was acknowledged, but could not be quite sure. From the shelter of a group of trees he stood a moment and looked after the retreating figure. It and the horse showed dark against a wide sky barred by stormy reds and purples. The wind whistled through the withered oaks; the long road with its lines of glimmering pools seemed to stretch endlessly into the sunset; and with every minute the night strode on. Age and loneliness could have found no fitter setting. A shiver ran through Elsmere as he stepped forward.

Undoubtedly the quarrel, helped by his work, and

the perpetual presence of that beautiful house commanding the whole country round it from its plateau above the river, kept Elsmere specially in mind of the squire. As before their first meeting, and in spite of it, he became more and more imaginatively preoccupied with him. One of the signs of it was a strong desire to read the squire's two famous books: one, *The Idols of the Market-place*, an attack on English beliefs; the other, *Essays on English Culture*, an attack on English ideals of education. He had never come across them as it happened, and perhaps Newcome's denunciation had some effect in inducing him for a time to refrain from reading them. But in December he ordered them and waited their coming with impatience. He said nothing of the order to Catherine; somehow there were by now two or three portions of his work, two or three branches of his thought, which had fallen out of their common discussion. After all she was not literary, and with all their oneness of soul there could not be an *identity* of interests or pursuits.

The books arrived in the morning. (Oh, how dimly well, with what a tightening of the heart, did Robert always remember that day in after years!) He was much too busy to look at them, and went off to a meeting. In the evening, coming home late from his night-school, he found Catherine tired, sent her to bed, and went himself into his study to put together some notes for a cottage lecture he was to give the following day. The packet of books, unopened, lay on his writing-table. He took off the wrapper, and in his eager way fell to reading the first he touched.

It was the first volume of *The Idols of the Market-place*. Ten or twelve years before, Mr. Wendover had launched

this book into a startled and protesting England. It had been the fruit of his first renewal of contact with English life and English ideas after his return from Berlin. Fresh from the speculative ferment of Germany and the far profaner scepticism of France, he had returned to a society where the first chapter of Genesis and the theory of verbal inspiration were still regarded as valid and important counters on the board of thought. The result had been this book. In it each stronghold of English popular religion had been assailed in turn, at a time when English orthodoxy was a far more formidable thing than it is now.

The Pentateuch, the Prophets, the Gospels, St. Paul, Tradition, the Fathers, Protestantism and Justification by Faith, the Eighteenth Century, the Broad Church Movement, Anglican Theology—the squire had his say about them all. And while the coolness and frankness of the method sent a shock of indignation and horror through the religious public, the subtle and caustic style, and the epigrams with which the book was strewn, forced both the religious and irreligious public to read, whether they would or no. A storm of controversy rose round the volumes, and some of the keenest observers of English life had said at the time, and maintained since, that the publication of the book had made or marked an epoch.

Robert had lit on those pages in the Essay on the Gospels where the squire fell to analysing the evidence for the Resurrection, following up his analysis by an attempt at reconstructing the conditions out of which the belief in “the legend” arose. Robert began to read vaguely at first, then to hurry on through page after page, still standing, seized at once by the bizarre power of the style, the audacity and range of the treatment,

Not a sound in the house. Outside, the tossing moaning December night; inside, the faintly crackling fire, the standing figure. Suddenly it was to Robert as though a cruel torturing hand were laid upon his inmost being. His breath failed him; the book slipped out of his grasp; he sank down upon his chair, his head in his hands. Oh, what a desolate intolerable moment! Over the young idealist soul there swept a dry destroying whirlwind of thought. Elements gathered from all sources—from his own historical work, from the squire's book, from the secret half-conscious recesses of the mind—entered into it, and as it passed it seemed to scorch the heart.

He stayed bowed there a while, then he roused himself with a half-groan, and hastily extinguishing his lamp he groped his way upstairs to his wife's room. Catherine lay asleep. The child, lost among its white coverings, slept too; there was a dim light over the bed, the books, the pictures. Beside his wife's pillow was a table on which there lay open her little Testament and the *Imitation* her father had given her. Elsmere sank down beside her, appalled by the contrast between this soft religious peace and that black agony of doubt which still overshadowed him. He knelt there, restraining his breath lest it should wake her, wrestling piteously with himself, crying for pardon, for faith, feeling himself utterly unworthy to touch even the dear hand that lay so near him. But gradually the traditional forces of his life reasserted themselves. The horror lifted. Prayer brought comfort and a passionate healing self-abasement. "Master, forgive—defend—purify," cried the aching heart. "*There is none other that fighteth for us, but only Thou, O God!*"

He did not open the book again. Next morning he put it back into his shelves. If there were any Christian

who could affront such an antagonist with a light heart, he felt with a shudder of memory it was not he.

"I have neither learning nor experience enough—yet," he said to himself slowly as he moved away, "of course it can be met, but *I* must grow, must think—first."

And of that night's wrestle he said not a word to any living soul. He did penance for it in the tenderest, most secret ways, but he shrank in misery from the thought of revealing it even to Catherine.

CHAPTER XXI.

MEANWHILE the poor poisoned folk at Mile End lived and apparently throve, in defiance of all the laws of the universe. Robert, as soon as he found that radical measures were for the time hopeless, had applied himself with redoubled energy to making the people use such palliatives as were within their reach, and had preached boiled water and the removal of filth till, as he declared to Catherine, his dreams were one long sanitary nightmare. But he was not confiding enough to believe that the people paid much heed, and he hoped more from a dry hard winter than from any exertion either of his or theirs.

But, alas! with the end of November a season of furious rain set in.

Then Robert began to watch Mile End with anxiety, for so far every outbreak of illness there had followed upon unusual damp. But the rains passed, leaving behind them no worse results than the usual winter crop of lung ailments and rheumatism, and he breathed again.

Christmas came and went, and with the end of De-

cember the wet weather returned. Day after day rolling masses of southwest cloud came up from the Atlantic and wrapped the whole country in rain, which reminded Catherine of her Westmoreland rain more than any she had yet seen in the South. Robert accused her of liking it for that reason, but she shook her head with a sigh, declaring that it was "nothing without the becks."

One afternoon she was shutting the door of the school behind her, and stepping out on the road skirting the green—the bedabbled wintry green—when she saw Robert emerging from the Mile End lane. She crossed over to him, wondering as she neared him that he seemed to take no notice of her. He was striding along, his wide-awake over his eyes, and so absorbed that she had almost touched him before he saw her.

"Darling, is that you? Don't stop me, I am going to take the pony-carriage in for Meyrick. I have just come back from that accursed place; three cases of diphtheria in one house, Sharland's wife—and two others down with fever."

She made a horrified exclamation.

"It will spread," he said gloomily, "I know it will. I never saw the children look such a ghastly crew before. Well, I must go for Meyrick and a nurse, and we must isolate and make a fight for it."

In a few days the diphtheria epidemic in the hamlet had reached terrible proportions. There had been one death, others were expected, and soon Robert in his brief hours at home could find no relief in anything, so heavy was the oppression of the day's memories. At first Catherine for the child's sake kept away; but the little Mary was weaned, had a good Scotch nurse, was in every way thriving, and after a day or two Catherine's craving

to help, to be with Robert in his trouble, was too strong to be withstood. But she dared not go backwards and forwards between her baby and the diphtheritic children. So she bethought herself of Mrs. Elsmere's servant, old Martha, who was still inhabiting Mrs. Elsmere's cottage till a tenant could be found for it, and doing good service meanwhile as an occasional parish nurse. The baby and its nurse went over to the cottage. Catherine carried the child there, wrapped close in maternal arms, and leaving her on old Martha's lap, went back to Robert.

Then she and he devoted themselves to a hand-to-hand fight with the epidemic. At the climax of it there were about twenty children down with it in different stages, and seven cases of fever. They had two hospital nurses; one of the better cottages, turned into a sanatorium, accommodated the worst cases under the nurses, and Robert and Catherine, directed by them and the doctors, took the responsibility of the rest, he helping to nurse the boys and she the girls. Of the fever cases Sharland's wife was the worst. A feeble creature at all times, it seemed almost impossible she could weather through. But day after day passed, and by dint of incessant nursing she still lived. A youth of twenty, the main support of a mother and five or six younger children, was also desperately ill. Robert hardly ever had him out of his thoughts, and the boy's dog-like affection for the rector, struggling with his deathly weakness, was like a perpetual exemplification of Ahriman and Ormuzd—the power of life struggling with the power of death.

It was a fierce fight. Presently it seemed to the husband and wife as though the few daily hours spent at the rectory were mere halts between successive acts of battle with the plague-fiend—a more real and grim

Grendel of the Marshes—for the lives of children. Catherine could always sleep in these intervals, quietly and dreamlessly; Robert very soon could only sleep by the help of some prescription of old Meyrick's. On all occasions of strain since his boyhood there had been signs in him of a certain lack of constitutional hardness which his mother knew very well, but which his wife was only just beginning to recognise. However, he laughed to scorn any attempt to restrain his constant goings and comings, or those hours of night-nursing, in which, as the hospital nurses were the first to admit, no one was so successful as the rector. And when he stood up on Sundays to preach in Murewell Church, the worn and spiritual look of the man, and the knowledge warm at each heart of those before him of how the rector not only talked but lived, carried every word home.

This strain upon all the moral and physical forces, however, strangely enough, came to Robert as a kind of relief. It broke through a tension of brain which of late had become an oppression. And for both him and Catherine these dark times had moments of intensest joy, points of white light illuminating heaven and earth. There were cloudy nights—wet, stormy January nights—when sometimes it happened to them to come back both together from the hamlet, Robert carrying a lantern, Catherine clothed in waterproof from head to foot, walking beside him, the rays flashing now on her face, now on the wooded sides of the lane, while the wind howled through the dark vault of branches overhead. And then, as they talked or were silent, suddenly a sense of the intense blessedness of this comradeship of theirs would rise like a flood in the man's heart, and he would fling his free arm round her, forcing her to stand a moment in the January night

and storm while he said to her words of passionate gratitude, of faith in an immortal union reaching beyond change or death, lost in a kiss which was a sacrament. Then there were the moments when they saw their child, held high in Martha's arms at the window, and leaping towards her mother; the moments when one pallid sickly being after another was pronounced out of danger; and by the help of them the weeks passed away.

Nor were they left without help from outside. Lady Helen Varley no sooner heard the news than she hurried over. Robert, on his way one morning from one cottage to another, saw her pony-carriage in the lane. He hastened up to her before she could dismount.

"No, Lady Helen, you mustn't come here," he said to her peremptorily, as she held out her hand.

"Oh, Mr. Elsmere, let me. My boy is in town with his grandmother. Let me just go through, at any rate, and see what I can send you."

Robert shook his head, smiling. A common friend of theirs and hers had once described this little lady to Elsmere by a French sentence which originally applied to the Duchesse de Choiseul. "*Une charmante petite fée sortie d'un œuf enchanté!*"—so it ran. Certainly, as Elsmere looked down upon her now, fresh from those squalid death-stricken hovels behind him, he was brought more abruptly than ever upon the contrasts of life. Lady Helen wore a green velvet and fur mantle, in the production of which even Worth had felt some pride; a little green velvet bonnet perched on her fair hair; one tiny hand, ungloved, seemed ablaze with diamonds; there were opals and diamonds somewhere at her throat, gleaming among her sables. But she wore her jewels as carelessly as she wore her high birth, her quaint irregular

prettiness, or the one or two brilliant gifts which made her sought after wherever she went. She loved her opals as she loved all bright things; if it pleased her to wear them in the morning, she wore them; and in five minutes she was capable of making the sourest puritan forget to frown on her and them. To Robert she always seemed the quintessence of breeding, of aristocracy at their best. All her freaks, her sallies, her absurdities even, were graceful. At her freest and gayest there were things in her—restraints, reticences, perceptions—which implied behind her generations of rich, happy, important people, with ample leisure to cultivate all the more delicate niceties of social feeling and relation. Robert was often struck by the curious differences between her and Rose. Rose was far the handsomer; she was at least as clever; and she had a strong imperious will where Lady Helen had only impulses and sympathies and *engouements*. But Rose belonged to the class which struggles, where each individual depends on himself and knows it. Lady Helen had never struggled for anything—all the best things of the world were hers so easily that she hardly gave them a thought; or rather, what she had gathered without pain she held so lightly, she dispensed so lavishly, that men's eyes followed her, fluttering through life, with much the same feeling as was struck from Clough's radical hero by the peerless Lady Maria—

“Live, be lovely, forget us, be beautiful, even to proudness,
Even for their poor sakes whose happiness is to behold you;
Live, be uncaring, be joyous, be sumptuous; only be lovely!”

“Uncaring,” however, little Lady Helen never was. If she was a fairy, she was a fairy all heart, all frank foolish smiles and tears.

"No, Lady Helen—no," Robert said again. "This is no place for you, and we are getting on capitally."

She pouted a little.

"I believe you and Mrs. Elsmere are just killing yourselves all in a corner, with no one to see," she said indignantly. "If you won't let me see, I shall send Sir Harry. But who"—and her brown fawn's eyes ran startled over the cottages before her—"who, Mr. Elsmere, does this *dreadful* place belong to?"

"Mr. Wendover," said Robert shortly.

"Impossible!" she cried incredulously. "Why, I wouldn't ask one of my dogs to sleep there," and she pointed to the nearest hovel, whereof the walls were tottering outwards, the thatch was falling to pieces, and the windows were mended with anything that came handy—rags, paper, or the crown of an old hat.

"No, you would be ill advised," said Robert, looking with a bitter little smile at the sleek Dachshund that sat blinking beside its mistress.

"But what is the agent about?"

Then Robert told her the story, not mincing his words. Since the epidemic had begun, all that sense of imaginative attraction which had been reviving in him towards the squire had been simply blotted out by a fierce heat of indignation. When he thought of Mr. Wendover now, he thought of him as the man to whom in strict truth it was owing that helpless children died in choking torture. All that agony of wrath and pity he had gone through in the last ten days sprang to his lips now as he talked to Lady Helen, and poured itself into his words.

"Old Meyrick and I have taken things into our own hands now," he said at last briefly. "We have already

made two cottages fairly habitable. To-morrow the inspector comes. I told the people yesterday I wouldn't be bound by my promise a day longer. He must put the screw on Henslowe, and if Henslowe dawdles, why we shall just drain and repair and sink for a well ourselves. I can find the money somehow. At present we get all our water from one of the farms on the brow."

"Money!" said Lady Helen impulsively, her looks warm with sympathy for the pale harassed young rector. "Sir Harry shall send you as much as you want. And anything else—blankets—coals?"

Out came her note-book, and Robert was drawn into a list. Then, full of joyfulness at being allowed to help, she gathered up her reins, she nodded her pretty little head at him, and was just starting off her ponies at full speed, equally eager "to tell Harry" and to ransack Churton for the stores required, when it occurred to her to pull up again.

"Oh, Mr. Elsmere, my aunt, Lady Charlotte, does nothing but talk about your sister-in-law. *Why* did you keep her all to yourself? Is it kind, is it neighbourly, to have such a wonder to stay with you and let nobody share?"

"A wonder?" said Robert, amused. "Rose plays the violin very well, but——"

"As if relations ever saw one in proper perspective!" exclaimed Lady Helen. "My aunt wants to be allowed to have her in town next season if you will all let her. I think she would find it fun. Aunt Charlotte knows all the world and his wife. And if I'm there, and Miss Leyburn will let me make friends with her, why, you know, *I* can just protect her a little from Aunt Charlotte!"

The little laughing face bent forward again; Robert,

smiling, raised his hat, and the ponies whirled her off. In anybody else Elsmere would have thought all this effusion insincere or patronising. But Lady Helen was the most spontaneous of mortals, and the only high-born woman he had ever met who was really, and not only apparently, free from the "nonsense of rank." Robert shrewdly suspected Lady Charlotte's social tolerance to be a mere varnish. But this little person, and her favourite brother Hugh, to judge from the accounts of him, must always have found life too romantic, too wildly and delightfully interesting from top to bottom, to be measured by any but romantic standards.

Next day Sir Harry Varley, a great burly country squire, who adored his wife, kept the hounds, owned a model estate, and thanked God every morning that he was an Englishman, rode over to Mile End. Robert, who had just been round the place with the inspector and was dead tired, had only energy to show him a few of the worst enormities. Sir Harry, leaving a cheque behind him, rode off with a discharge of strong language, at which Robert, clergyman as he was, only grimly smiled.

A few days later Mr. Wendover's crimes as a landowner, his agent's brutality, young Elsmere's devotion, and the horrors of the Mile End outbreak, were in everybody's mouths. The county was roused. The Radical newspaper came out on the Saturday with a flaming article; Robert, much to his annoyance, found himself the local hero; and money began to come in to him freely.

On the Monday morning Henslowe appeared on the scene with an army of workmen. A racy communication from the inspector had reached him two days before, so had a copy of the *Churton Advertiser*. He had spent Sunday in a drinking bout, turning over all possible plans

of vengeance and evasion. Towards the evening, however, his wife, a gaunt clever Scotchwoman, who saw ruin before them, and had on occasion an even sharper tongue than her husband, managed to capture the supplies of brandy in the house and effectually conceal them. Then she waited for the moment of collapse which came on towards morning, and with her hands on her hips she poured into him a volley of home-truths which not even Sir Harry Varley could have bettered. Henslowe's nerve gave way. He went out at daybreak, white and sullen, to look for workmen.

Robert, standing on the step of a cottage, watched him give his orders, and took vigilant note of their substance. They embodied the inspector's directions, and the rector was satisfied. Henslowe was obliged to pass him on his way to another group of houses. At first he affected not to see the rector, then suddenly Elsmere was conscious that the man's bloodshot eyes were on him. Such a look! If hate could have killed, Elsmere would have fallen where he stood. Yet the man's hand mechanically moved to his hat, as though the spell of his wife's harangue were still potent over his shaking muscles.

Robert took no notice whatever of the salutation. He stood calmly watching till Henslowe disappeared into the last house. Then he called one of the agent's train, heard what was to be done, gave a sharp nod of assent, and turned on his heel. So far so good: the servant had been made to feel, but he wished it had been the master. Oh, those three little emaciated creatures whose eyes he had closed, whose clammy hands he had held to the last!—what reckoning should be asked for their undeserved torments when the Great Account came to be made up?

Meanwhile not a sound apparently of all this reached

the squire in the sublime solitude of Murewell. A fortnight had passed. Henslowe had been conquered, the county had rushed to Elsmere's help, and neither he nor Mrs. Darcy had made a sign. Their life was so abnormal that it was perfectly possible they had heard nothing. Elsmere wondered when they *would* hear.

The rector's chief help and support all through had been old Meyrick. The parish doctor had been in bed with rheumatism when the epidemic broke out, and Robert, feeling it a comfort to be rid of him, had thrown the whole business into the hands of Meyrick and his son. This son was nominally his father's junior partner, but as he was, besides, a young and brilliant M.D. fresh from a great hospital, and his father was just a poor old general practitioner, with the barest qualification, and only forty years' experience to recommend him, it will easily be imagined that the subordination was purely nominal. Indeed young Meyrick was fast ousting his father in all directions, and the neighbourhood, which had so far found itself unable either to enter or to quit this mortal scene without old Meyrick's assistance, was beginning to send notes to the house in Churton High Street, whereon the superscription "*Dr. Edward Meyrick*" was underlined with ungrateful emphasis. The father took his deposition very quietly. Only on Murewell Hall would he allow no trespassing, and so long as his son left him undisturbed there, he took his effacement in other quarters with perfect meekness.

Young Elsmere's behaviour to him, however, at a time when all the rest of the Churton world was beginning to hold him cheap and let him see it, had touched the old man's heart, and he was the rector's slave in this Mile End business. Edward Meyrick would come whirling

in and out of the hamlet once a day. Robert was seldom sorry to see the back of him. His attainments, of course, were useful, but his cocksureness was irritating, and his manner to his father abominable. The father, on the other hand, came over in the shabby pony-cart he had driven for the last forty years, and having himself no press of business, would spend hours with the rector over the cases, giving them an infinity of patient watching, and amusing Robert by the cautious hostility he would allow himself every now and then towards his son's new-fangled devices.

At first Meyrick showed himself fidgety as to the squire. Had he been seen, been heard from? He received Robert's sharp negatives with long sighs, but Robert clearly saw that, like the rest of the world, he was too much afraid of Mr. Wendover to go and beard him. Some months before, as it happened, Elsmere had told him the story of his encounter with the squire, and had been a good deal moved and surprised by the old man's concern.

One day, about three weeks from the beginning of the outbreak, when the state of things in the hamlet was beginning decidedly to mend, Meyrick arrived for his morning round, much preoccupied. He hurried his work a little, and after it was done asked Robert to walk up the road with him.

"I have seen the squire, sir," he said, turning on his companion with a certain excitement.

Robert flushed.

"Have you?" he replied with his hands behind him, and a world of expression in his sarcastic voice.

"You misjudge him! You misjudge him, Mr. Elsmere!" the old man said tremulously. "I told you he

could know nothing of this business—and he didn't! He has been in town part of the time, and down here—how is he to know anything? He sees nobody. That man Henslowe, sir, must be a real *bad* fellow."

"Don't abuse the man," said Robert, looking up. "It's not worth while, when you can say your mind of the master."

Old Meyrick sighed.

"Well," said Robert, after a moment, his lip drawn and quivering, "you told him the story, I suppose? Seven deaths, is it, by now? Well, what sort of impression did these unfortunate accidents"—and he smiled—"produce?"

"He talked of sending money," said Meyrick doubtfully; "he said he would have Henslowe up and inquire. He seemed put about and annoyed. Oh, Mr. Elsmere, you think too hardly of the squire, that you do!"

They strolled on together in silence. Robert was not inclined to discuss the matter. But old Meyrick seemed to be labouring under some suppressed emotion, and presently he began upon his own experiences as a doctor of the Wendover family. He had already broached the subject more or less vaguely with Robert. Now, however, he threw his medical reserve, generally his strongest characteristic, to the winds. He insisted on telling his companion, who listened reluctantly, the whole miserable and ghastly story of the old squire's suicide. He described the heir's summons, his arrival just in time for the last scene with all its horrors, and that mysterious condition of the squire for some months afterwards, when no one, not even Mrs. Darcy, had been admitted to the Hall, and old Meyrick, directed at intervals by a great London doctor, had been the only spectator of Roger

Wendover's physical and mental breakdown, the only witness of that dark consciousness of inherited fatality which at that period of his life not even the squire's iron will had been able wholly to conceal.

Robert, whose attention was inevitably roused after a while, found himself with some curiosity realising the squire from another man's totally different point of view. Evidently Meyrick had seen him at such moments as wring from the harshest nature whatever grains of tenderness, of pity, or of natural human weakness may be in it. And it was clear, too, that the squire, conscious perhaps of a shared secret, and feeling a certain soothing influence in the *naïveté* and simplicity of the old man's sympathy, had allowed himself at times, in the years succeeding that illness of his, an amount of unbending in Meyrick's presence, such as probably no other mortal had ever witnessed in him since his earliest youth.

And yet how childish the old man's whole mental image of the squire was after all! What small account it made of the subtleties, the gnarled intricacies and contradictions of such a character! Horror at his father's end, and dread of a like fate for himself! Robert did not know very much of the squire, but he knew enough to feel sure that this confiding indulgent theory of Meyrick's was ludicrously far from the mark as an adequate explanation of Mr. Wendover's later life.

Presently Meyrick became aware of the sort of tacit resistance which his companion's mind was opposing to his own. He dropped the wandering narrative he was busy upon with a sigh.

"Ah well, I daresay it's hard, it's hard," he said with patient acquiescence in his voice, "to believe a man can't help himself. I daresay we doctors get to muddle up

right and wrong. But if ever there was a man sick in mind—for all his book-learning they talk about—and sick in soul, that man is the squire.”

Robert looked at him with a softer expression. There was a new dignity about the simple old man. The old-fashioned deference, which had never let him forget in speaking to Robert that he was speaking to a man of family, and which showed itself in all sorts of antiquated locutions which were a torment to his son, had given way to something still more deeply ingrained. His gaunt figure, with the stoop, and the spectacles and the long straight hair—like the figure of a superannuated schoolmaster—assumed, as he turned again to his younger companion, something of authority, something almost of stateliness.

“Ah, Mr. Elsmere,” he said, laying his shrunk hand on the younger man’s sleeve and speaking with emotion, “you’re very good to the poor. We’re all proud of you—you and your good lady. But when you were coming, and I heard tell all about you, I thought of my poor squire, and I said to myself, ‘That young man ’ll be good to *him*. The squire will make friends with him, and Mr. Elsmere will have a good wife—and there’ll be children born to him—and the squire will take an interest—and—and—maybe——’”

The old man paused. Robert grasped his hand silently.

“And there was something in the way between you,” the speaker went on, sighing. “I daresay you were quite right—quite right. I can’t judge. Only there are ways of doing a thing. And it was a last chance; and now it’s missed—it’s missed. Ah! it’s no good talking; he has a heart—he has! Many’s the kind thing he’s done

in old days for me and mine—I'll never forget them! But all these last few years—oh, I know, I know. You can't go and shut your heart up, and fly in the face of all the duties the Lord laid on you, without losing yourself and setting the Lord against you. But it is pitiful, Mr. Elsmere, it's pitiful!"

It seemed to Robert suddenly as though there was a Divine breath passing through the wintry lane and through the shaking voice of the old man. Beside the spirit looking out of those wrinkled eyes, his own hot youth, its justest resentments, its most righteous angers, seemed crude, harsh, inexcusable.

"Thank you, Meyrick, thank you, and God bless you! Don't imagine I will forget a word you have said to me."

The rector shook the hand he held warmly twice over, a gentle smile passed over Meyrick's ageing face, and they parted.

That night it fell to Robert to sit up after midnight with John Allwood, the youth of twenty whose case had been a severer tax on the powers of the little nursing staff than perhaps any other. Mother and neighbours were worn out, and it was difficult to spare a hospital nurse for long together from the diphtheria cases. Robert, therefore, had insisted during the preceding week on taking alternate nights with one of the nurses. During the first hours before midnight he slept soundly on a bed made up in the ground-floor room of the little sanatorium. Then at twelve the nurse called him, and he went out, his eyes still heavy with sleep, into a still frosty winter's night.

After so much rain, so much restlessness of wind and cloud, the silence and the starry calm of it were infinitely welcome. The sharp cold air cleared his brain and

braced his nerves, and by the time he reached the cottage whither he was bound, he was broad awake. He opened the door softly, passed through the lower room, crowded with sleeping children, climbed the narrow stairs as noiselessly as possible, and found himself in a garret, faintly lit, a bed in one corner and a woman sitting beside it. The woman glided away, the rector looked carefully at the table of instructions hanging over the bed, assured himself that wine and milk and beef essence and medicines were ready to his hand, put out his watch on the wooden table near the bed, and sat him down to his task. The boy was sleeping the sleep of weakness. Food was to be given every half-hour, and in this perpetual impulse to the system lay his only chance.

The rector had his Greek Testament with him, and could just read it by the help of the dim light. But after a while, as the still hours passed on, it dropped on to his knee, and he sat thinking—endlessly thinking. The young labourer lay motionless beside him, the lines of the long emaciated frame showing through the bed-clothes. The night-light flickered on the broken discoloured ceiling; every now and then a mouse scratched in the plaster; the mother's heavy breathing came from the next room; sometimes a dog barked or an owl cried outside. Otherwise deep silence, such silence as drives the soul back upon itself.

Elsmere was conscious of a strange sense of moral expansion. The stern judgments, the passionate condemnations which his nature housed so painfully, seemed lifted from it. The soul breathed an "ampler æther, a diviner air." Oh! the mysteries of life and character, the subtle inexhaustible claims of pity! The problems which hang upon our being here; its mixture of elements;

the pressure of its inexorable physical environment; the relations of mind to body, of man's poor will to this tangled tyrannous life—it was along these old, old lines his thought went painfully groping; and always at intervals it came back to the squire, pondering, seeking to understand, a new soberness, a new humility and patience entering in.

And yet it was not Meyrick's facts exactly that had brought this about. Robert thought them imperfect, only half true. Rather was it the spirit of love, of infinite forbearance in which the simpler, duller nature had declared itself that had appealed to him, nay, reproached him.

Then these thoughts led him on farther and farther from man to God, from human defect to the Eternal Perfectness. Never once during those hours did Elsmere's hand fail to perform its needed service to the faint sleeper beside him, and yet that night was one long dream and strangeness to him, nothing real anywhere but consciousness, and God its source; the soul attacked every now and then by phantom stabs of doubt, of bitter brief misgiving, as the barriers of sense between it and the eternal enigma grew more and more transparent, wrestling awhile, and then prevailing. And each golden moment of certainty, of conquering faith, seemed to Robert in some sort a gift from Catherine's hand. It was she who led him through the shades; it was her voice murmuring in his ear.

When the first gray dawn began to creep in slowly perceptible waves into the room, Elsmere felt as though not hours but years of experience lay between him and the beginning of his watch.

"It is by these moments we should date our lives,"

he murmured to himself as he rose; "they are the only real landmarks."

It was eight o'clock, and the nurse who was to relieve him had come. The results of the night for his charge were good: the strength had been maintained, the pulse was firmer, the temperature lower. The boy, throwing off his drowsiness, lay watching the rector's face as he talked in an undertone to the nurse, his haggard eyes full of a dumb friendly wistfulness. When Robert bent over him to say good-bye, this expression brightened into something more positive, and Robert left him, feeling at last that there was a promise of life in his look and touch.

In another moment he had stepped out into the January morning. It was clear and still as the night had been. In the east there was a pale promise of sun; the reddish-brown trunks of the fir woods had just caught it, and rose faintly glowing in endless vistas and colonnades one behind the other. The flooded river itself rushed through the bridge as full and turbid as before, but all the other water surfaces had gleaming films of ice. The whole ruinous place had a clean, almost a festal air under the touch of the frost, while on the side of the hill leading to Murewell, tree rose above tree, the delicate network of their wintry twigs and branches set against stretches of frost-whitened grass, till finally they climbed into the pale all-completing blue. In a copse close at hand there were woodcutters at work, and piles of gleaming laths shining through the underwood. Robins hopped along the frosty road, and as he walked on through the houses towards the bridge, Robert's quick ear distinguished that most wintry of all sounds—the cry of a flock of fieldfares passing overhead.

As he neared the bridge he suddenly caught sight of

a figure upon it, the figure of a man wrapped in a large Inverness cloak, leaning against the stone parapet. With a start he recognised the squire.

He went up to him without an instant's slackening of his steady step. The squire heard the sound of some one coming, turned, and saw the rector.

"I am glad to see you here, Mr. Wendover," said Robert, stopping and holding out his hand. "I meant to have come to talk to you about this place this morning. I ought to have come before."

He spoke gently, and quite simply, almost as if they had parted the day before. The squire touched his hand for an instant.

"You may not, perhaps, be aware, Mr. Elsmere," he said, endeavouring to speak with all his old hauteur, while his heavy lips twitched nervously, "that, for one reason and another, I knew nothing of the epidemic here till yesterday, when Meyrick told me."

"I heard from Mr. Meyrick that it was so. As you are here now, Mr. Wendover, and I am in no great hurry to get home, may I take you through and show you the people?"

The squire at last looked at him straight—at the face worn and pale, yet still so extraordinarily youthful, in which something of the solemnity and high emotion of the night seemed to be still lingering.

"Are you just come?" he said abruptly, "or are you going back?"

"I have been here through the night, sitting up with one of the fever cases. It's hard work for the nurses, and the relations sometimes, without help."

The squire moved on mechanically towards the village, and Robert moved beside him.

“And Mrs. Elsmere?”

“Mrs. Elsmere was here most of yesterday. She used to stay the night when the diphtheria was at its worst; but there are only four anxious cases left—the rest all convalescent.”

The squire said no more, and they turned into the lane, where the ice lay thick in the deep ruts, and on either hand curls of smoke rose into the clear cold sky. The squire looked about him with eyes which no detail escaped. Robert, without a word of comment, pointed out this feature and that, showed where Henslowe had begun repairs, where the new well was to be, what the water supply had been till now, drew the squire's attention to the roofs, the pigstyes, the drainage, or rather complete absence of drainage, and all in the dry voice of some one going through a catalogue. Word had already fled like wildfire through the hamlet that the squire was there. Children and adults, a pale emaciated crew, poured out into the wintry air to look. The squire knit his brows with annoyance as the little crowd in the lane grew. Robert took no notice.

Presently he pushed open the door of the house where he had spent the night. In the kitchen a girl of sixteen was clearing away the various nondescript heaps on which the family had slept, and was preparing breakfast. The squire looked at the floor.

“I thought I understood from Henslowe,” he muttered, as though to himself, “that there were no mud floors left on the estate——”

“There are only three houses in Mile End without them,” said Robert, catching what he said.

They went upstairs, and the mother stood open-eyed while the squire's restless look gathered in the details of

the room, the youth's face, as he lay back on his pillows, whiter than they, exhausted and yet refreshed by the sponging with vinegar and water which the mother had just been administering to him; the bed, the gaps in the worm-eaten boards, the spots in the roof where the plaster bulged inward, as though a shake would bring it down; the coarse china shepherdesses on the mantel-shelf, and the flowers which Catherine had put there the day before. He asked a few questions, said an abrupt word or two to the mother, and they tramped downstairs again and into the street. Then Robert took him across to the little improvised hospital, saying to him on the threshold, with a moment's hesitation,—

“As you know, for adults there is not much risk, but there is always some risk——”

A peremptory movement of the squire's hand stopped him, and they went in. In the downstairs room were half-a-dozen convalescents, pale, shadowy creatures four of them under ten, sitting up in their little cots, each of them with a red flannel jacket drawn from Lady Helen's stores, and enjoying the breakfast which a nurse in white cap and apron had just brought them. Upstairs, in a room from which a lath-and-plaster partition had been removed, and which had been adapted, warmed and ventilated by various contrivances to which Robert and Meyrick had devoted their practical minds, were the “four anxious cases.” One of them, a little creature of six, one of Sharland's black-eyed children, was sitting up, supported by the nurse, and coughing its little life away. As soon as he saw it, Robert's step quickened. He forgot the squire altogether. He came and stood by the bedside, rigidly still, for he could do nothing, but his whole soul absorbed in that horrible struggle for air. How

often he had seen it now, and never without the same wild sense of revolt and protest! At last the hideous membrane was loosened, the child got relief, and lay back white and corpse-like, but with a pitiful momentary relaxation of the drawn lines on its little brow. Robert stooped and kissed the damp tiny hand. The child's eyes remained shut, but the fingers made a feeble effort to close on his.

"Mr. Elsmere," said the nurse, a motherly body, looking at him with friendly admonition, "if you don't go home and rest you'll be ill too, and I'd like to know who'll be the better for that?"

"How many deaths?" asked the squire abruptly, touching Elsmere's arm, and so reminding Robert of his existence. "Meyrick spoke of deaths."

He stood near the door, but his eyes were fixed on the little bed, on the half-swooning child.

"Seven," said Robert, turning upon him. "Five of diphtheria, two of fever. That little one will go too."

"Horrible!" said the squire under his breath, and then moved to the door.

The two men went downstairs in perfect silence. Below, in the convalescent room, the children were capable of smiles, and of quick coquettish beckonings to the rector to come and make game with them as usual. But he could only kiss his hand to them and escape, for there was more to do.

He took the squire through all the remaining fever cases, and into several of the worst cottages—Milsom's among them—and when it was all over they emerged into the lane again, near the bridge. There was still a crowd of children and women hanging about, watching eagerly for the squire, whom many of them had never

seen at all, and about whom various myths had gradually formed themselves in the countryside. The squire walked away from them hurriedly, followed by Robert, and again they halted on the centre of the bridge. A horse led by a groom was being walked up and down on a flat piece of road just beyond.

It was an awkward moment. Robert never forgot the thrill of it, or the association of wintry sunshine streaming down upon a sparkling world of ice and delicate woodland and foam-flecked river.

The squire turned towards him irresolutely; his sharply-cut wrinkled lips opening and closing again. Then he held out his hand: "Mr. Elsmere, I did you a wrong—I did this place and its people a wrong. In my view, regret for the past is useless. Much of what has occurred here is plainly irreparable; I will think what can be done for the future. As for my relation to you, it rests with you to say whether it can be amended. I recognise that you have just cause of complaint."

What invincible pride there was in the man's very surrender! But Elsmere was not repelled by it. He knew that in their hour together the squire had *felt*. His soul had lost its bitterness. The dead and their wrong were with God.

He took the squire's outstretched hand, grasping it cordially, a pure unworldly dignity in his whole look and bearing.

"Let us be friends, Mr. Wendover. It will be a great comfort to us—my wife and me. Will you remember us both very kindly to Mrs. Darcy?"

Commonplace words, but words that made an epoch in the life of both. In another minute the squire, on horseback, was trotting along the side road leading to

the Hall, and Robert was speeding home to Catherine as fast as his long legs could carry him.

She was waiting for him on the steps, shading her eyes against the unwonted sun. He kissed her with the spirits of a boy and told her all his news.

Catherine listened bewildered, not knowing what to say or how all at once to forgive, to join Robert in forgetting. But that strange spiritual glow about him was not to be withstood. She threw her arms about him at last with a half sob,"—

"Oh, Robert—yes! Dear Robert—thank God!"

"Never think any more," he said at last, leading her in from the little hall, "of what has been, only of what shall be! Oh, Catherine, give me some tea; and never did I see anything so tempting as that armchair."

He sank down into it, and when she put his breakfast beside him she saw with a start that he was fast asleep. The wife stood and watched him, the signs of fatigue round eyes and mouth, the placid expression, and her face was soft with tenderness and joy. "Of course—of course, even that hard man must love him. Who could help it? My Robert!"

And so now in this disguise, now in that, the supreme hour of Catherine's life stole on and on towards her.

CHAPTER XXII.

As may be imagined, the *Churton Advertiser* did not find its way to Murewell. It was certainly no pressure of social disapproval that made the squire go down to Mile End in that winter's dawn. The county might talk;

or the local press might harangue, till Doomsday, and Mr. Wendover would either know nothing or care less.

Still his interview with Meyrick in the park after his return from a week in town, whither he had gone to see some old Berlin friends, had been a shock to him. A man may play the intelligent recluse, may refuse to fit his life to his neighbours' notions as much as you please, and still find death, especially death for which he has some responsibility, as disturbing a fact as the rest of us.

He went home in much irritable discomfort. It seemed to him probably that fortune need not have been so eager to put him in the wrong. To relieve his mind he sent for Henslowe, and in an interview, the memory of which sent a shiver through the agent to the end of his days, he let it be seen that though it did not for the moment suit him to dismiss the man who had brought this upon him, that man's reign in any true sense was over.

But afterwards the squire was still restless. What was astir in him was not so much pity or remorse as certain instincts of race which still survived under the strange superstructure of manners he had built upon them. It may be the part of a gentleman and a scholar to let the agent whom you have interposed between yourself and a boorish peasantry have a free hand; but, after all, the estate is yours, and to expose the rector of the parish to all sorts of avoidable risks in the pursuit of his official duty by reason of the gratuitous filth of your property, is an act of doubtful breeding. The squire in his most rough-and-tumble days at Berlin had always felt himself the grandee as well as the student. He abhorred sentimentalism, but neither did he choose to cut an unseemly figure in his own eyes.

After a night, therefore, less tranquil or less meditative than usual, he rose early and sallied forth at one of those unusual hours he generally chose for walking. The thing must be put right somehow, and at once, with as little waste of time and energy as possible, and Henslowe had shown himself not to be trusted; so telling a servant to follow him, the squire had made his way with difficulty to a place he had not seen for years.

Then had followed the unexpected and unwelcome apparition of the rector. The squire did not want to be impressed by the young man, did not want to make friends with him. No doubt his devotion had served his own purposes. Still Mr. Wendover was one of the subtlest living judges of character when he pleased, and his enforced progress through these hovels with Elsmere had not exactly softened him, but had filled him with a curious contempt for his own hastiness of judgment.

"History would be inexplicable after all without the honest fanatic," he said to himself on the way home. "I suppose I had forgotten it. There is nothing like a dread of being bored for blunting your psychological instinct."

In the course of the day he sent off a letter to the rector intimating in the very briefest, driest way that the cottages should be rebuilt on a different site as soon as possible, and enclosing a liberal contribution towards the expenses incurred in fighting the epidemic. When the letter was gone he drew his books towards him with a sound which was partly disgust, partly relief. This annoying business had wretchedly interrupted him, and his concessions left him mainly conscious of a strong nervous distaste for the idea of any fresh interview with young

Elsmere. He had got his money and his apology; let him be content.

However, next morning after breakfast Mr. Wendover once more saw his study door open to admit the tall figure of the rector. The note and cheque had reached Robert late the night before, and, true to his new-born determination to make the best of the squire, he had caught up his wideawake at the first opportunity and walked off to the Hall to acknowledge the gift in person. The interview opened as awkwardly as it was possible, and with their former conversation on the same spot fresh in their minds both men spent a sufficiently difficult ten minutes. The squire was asking himself, indeed, impatiently, all the time, whether he could possibly be forced in the future to put up with such an experience again, and Robert found his host, if less sarcastic than before, certainly as impenetrable as ever.

At last, however, the Mile End matter was exhausted, and then Robert, as good luck would have it, turned his longing eyes on the squire's books, especially on the latest volumes of a magnificent German *Weltgeschichte* lying near his elbow, which he had coveted for months without being able to conquer his conscience sufficiently to become the possessor of it. He took it up with an exclamation of delight, and a quiet critical remark that exactly hit the value and scope of the book. The squire's eyebrows went up, and the corners of his mouth slackened visibly. Half an hour later the two men, to the amazement of Mrs. Darcy, who was watching them from the drawing-room window, walked back to the park gates together, and what Robert's nobility and beauty of character would never have won him, though he had worn himself to death in the service of the poor and the tor-

mented under the squire's eyes, a chance coincidence of intellectual interest had won him almost in a moment.

The squire walked back to the house under a threatening sky, his mackintosh cloak wrapped about him, his arms folded, his mind full of an unwonted excitement.

The sentiment of long-past days—days in Berlin, in Paris, where conversations such as that he had just passed through were the daily relief and reward of labour, was stirring in him. Occasionally he had endeavoured to import the materials for them from the Continent, from London. But as a matter of fact it was years since he had had any such talk as this with an Englishman on English ground, and he suddenly realised that he had been unwholesomely solitary, and that for the scholar there is no nerve stimulus like that of an occasional interchange of ideas with some one acquainted with his *Fach*.

“Who would ever have thought of discovering instincts and aptitudes of such a kind in this long-legged optimist?” The squire shrugged his shoulders as he thought of the attempt involved in such a personality to combine both worlds, the world of action and the world of thought. Absurd! Of course, ultimately one or other must go to the wall.

Meanwhile, what a ludicrous waste of time and opportunity that he and this man should have been at cross-purposes like this! “Why the deuce couldn't he have given some rational account of himself to begin with!” thought the squire irritably, forgetting, of course, who it was that had wholly denied him the opportunity. “And then the sending back of those books: what a piece of idiocy!”

Granted an historical taste in this young parson, it was a curious chance, Mr. Wendover reflected, that in his

choice of a subject he should just have fallen on the period of the later empire—of the passage from the old world to the new, where the squire was a master. The squire fell to thinking of the kind of knowledge implied in his remarks, of the stage he seemed to have reached, and then to cogitating as to the books he must be now in want of. He went back to his library, ran over the shelves, picking out volumes here and there with an unwonted glow and interest all the while. He sent for a case, and made a youth who sometimes acted as his secretary pack them. And still as he went back to his own work new names would occur to him, and full of the scholar's avaricious sense of the shortness of time, he would shake his head and frown over the three months which young Elsmere had already passed, grappling with problems like Teutonic Arianism, the spread of Monasticism in Gaul and Heaven knows what besides, half a mile from the man and the library which could have supplied him with the best help to be got in England, unbenefited by either! Mile End was obliterated, and the annoyance of the morning forgotten.

The next day was Sunday, a wet January Sunday, raw and sleety, the frost breaking up on all sides and flooding the roads with mire.

Robert, rising in his place to begin morning service, and wondering to see the congregation so good on such a day, was suddenly startled, as his eye travelled mechanically over to the Hall pew, usually tenanted by Mrs. Darcy in solitary state, to see the characteristic figure of the squire. His amazement was so great that he almost stumbled in the exhortation, and his feeling was evidently shared by the congregation, which throughout the service showed a restlessness, an excited tendency

to peer round corners and pillars, that was not favourable to devotion.

“Has he come to spy out the land?” the rector thought to himself, and could not help a momentary tremor at the idea of preaching before so formidable an auditor. Then he pulled himself together by a great effort, and fixing his eyes on a shock-headed urchin half way down the church, read the service to him. Catherine meanwhile in her seat on the northern side of the nave, her soul lulled in Sunday peace, knew nothing of Mr. Wendover’s appearance.

Robert preached on the first sermon of Jesus, on the first appearance of the young Master in the synagogue at Nazareth:—

“This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears!”

The sermon dwelt on the Messianic aspect of Christ’s mission, on the mystery and poetry of that long national expectation, on the pathos of Jewish disillusion, on the sureness and beauty of Christian insight as faith gradually transferred trait after trait of the Messiah of prophecy to the Christ of Nazareth. At first there was a certain amount of hesitation, a slight wavering hither and thither—a difficult choice of words—and then the soul freed itself from man, and the preacher forgot all but his Master and his people.

At the door as he came out stood Mr. Wendover, and Catherine, slightly flushed and much puzzled for conversation, beside him. The Hall carriage was drawn close up to the door, and Mrs. Darcy, evidently much excited, had her small head out of the window, and was showering a number of flighty inquiries and suggestions on her brother, to which he paid no more heed than to the patter of the rain.

When Robert appeared the squire addressed him ceremoniously—

“With your leave, Mr. Elsmere, I will walk with you to the rectory.” Then, in another voice, “Go home, Lætitia, and don’t send anything or anybody.”

He made a signal to the coachman, and the carriage started, Mrs. Darcy’s protesting head remaining out of window as long as anything could be seen of the group at the church door. The odd little creature had paid one or two hurried and recent visits to Catherine during the quarrel, visits so filled, however, with vague railing against her brother and by a queer incoherent melancholy, that Catherine felt them extremely uncomfortable, and took care not to invite them. Clearly she was mortally afraid of “Roger,” and yet ashamed of being afraid. Catherine could see that all the poor thing’s foolish whims and affectations were trampled on; that she suffered, rebelled, found herself no more able to affect Mr. Wendover than if she had been a fly buzzing round him, and became all the more foolish and whimsical in consequence.

The squire and the Elsmeres crossed the common to the rectory, followed at a discreet interval by groups of villagers curious to get a look at the squire. Robert was conscious of a good deal of embarrassment, but did his best to hide it. Catherine felt all through as if the skies had fallen. The squire alone was at his ease, or as much at his ease as he ever was. He commented on the congregation, even condescended to say something of the singing, and passed over the staring of the choristers with a magnanimity of silence which did him credit.

They reached the rectory door, and it was evidently the squire’s purpose to come in, so Robert invited him in. Catherine threw open her little drawing-room door,

and then was seized with shyness as the squire passed in, and she saw over his shoulder her baby, lying kicking and crowing on the hearth-rug, in anticipation of her arrival, the nurse watching it. The squire in his great cloak stopped, and looked down at the baby as if it had been some curious kind of reptile. The nurse blushed, curtsied, and caught up the gurgling creature in a twinkling.

Robert made a laughing remark on the tyranny and ubiquity of babies. The squire smiled grimly. He supposed it was necessary that the human race should be carried on. Catherine meanwhile slipped out and ordered another place to be laid at the dinner-table, devoutly hoping that it might not be used.

It was used. The squire stayed till it was necessary to invite him, then accepted the invitation, and Catherine found herself dispensing boiled mutton to him, while Robert supplied him with some very modest claret, the sort of wine which a man who drinks none thinks it necessary to have in the house, and watched the nervousness of their little parlour-maid with a fellow-feeling which made it difficult for him during the early part of the meal to keep a perfectly straight countenance. After a while, however, both he and Catherine were ready to admit that the squire was making himself agreeable. He talked of Paris, of a conversation he had had with M. Renan, whose name luckily was quite unknown to Catherine, as to the state of things in the French Chamber.

"A set of chemists and quill-drivers," he said contemptuously; "but as Renan remarked to me, there is one thing to be said for a government of that sort, 'Ils ne font pas la guerre.' And so long as they don't run France into adventures, and a man can keep a roof over his head and a sou in his pocket, the men of letters at

any rate can rub along. The really interesting thing in France just now is not French politics—Heaven save the mark!—but French scholarship. There never was so little original genius going in Paris, and there never was so much good work being done.”

Robert thought the point of view eminently characteristic.

“Catholicism, I suppose,” he said, “as a force to be reckoned with, is dwindling more and more?”

“Absolutely dead,” said the squire emphatically, “as an *intellectual* force. They haven’t got a writer, scarcely a preacher. Not one decent book has been produced on that side for years.”

“And the Protestants, too,” said Robert, “have lost all their best men of late,” and he mentioned one or two well-known French Protestant names.

“Oh, as to French Protestantism”—and the squire’s shrug was superb—“Teutonic Protestantism is in the order of things, so to speak, but *Latin* Protestantism! There is no more sterile hybrid in the world!”

Then, becoming suddenly aware that he might have said something inconsistent with his company, the squire stopped abruptly. Robert, catching Catherine’s quick compression of the lips, was grateful to him, and the conversation moved on in another direction.

Yes, certainly, all things considered, Mr. Wendover made himself agreeable. He ate his boiled mutton and drank his *ordinaire* like a man, and when the meal was over, and he and Robert had withdrawn into the study, he gave an emphatic word of praise to the coffee which Catherine’s housewifely care sent after them, and accepting a cigar, he sank into the armchair by the fire and spread a bony hand to the blaze, as if he had been at

home in that particular corner for months. Robert, sitting opposite to him, and watching his guest's eyes travel round the room, with its medicine shelves, its rods and nets, and preparations of uncanny beasts, its parish litter, and its teeming bookcases, felt that the Mile End matter was turning out oddly indeed.

"I have packed you a case of books, Mr. Elsmere," said the squire, after a puff or two at his cigar. "How have you got on without that collection of Councils?"

He smiled a little awkwardly. It was one of the books Robert had sent back. Robert flushed. He did not want the squire to regard him as wholly dependent on Murewell.

"I bought it," he said, rather shortly. "I have ruined myself in books lately, and the London Library too supplies me really wonderfully well."

"Are these your books?" The squire got up to look at them. "Hum, not at all bad for a beginning. I have sent you so and so," and he named one or two costly folios that Robert had long pined for in vain.

The rector's eyes glistened.

"That was very good of you," he said simply. "They will be most welcome."

"And now, how much *time*," said the other, settling himself again to his cigar, his thin legs crossed over each other, and his great head sunk into his shoulders, "how much time do you give to this work?"

"Generally the mornings—not always. A man with twelve hundred souls to look after, you know, Mr. Wendover," said Elsmere, with a bright half-defiant accent, "can't make grubbing among the Franks his main business."

The squire said nothing, and smoked on. Robert

gathered that his companion thought his chances of doing anything worth mentioning very small.

"Oh no," he said, following out his own thought with a shake of his curly hair; "of course I shall never do very much. But if I don't, it won't be for want of knowing what the scholar's ideal is." And he lifted his hand with a smile towards the squire's book on *English Culture*, which stood in the bookcase just above him. The squire, following the gesture, smiled too. It was a faint, slight illumining, but it changed the face agreeably.

Robert began to ask questions about the book, about the pictures contained in it of foreign life and foreign universities. The squire consented to be drawn out, and presently was talking at his very best.

Racy stories of Mommsen or Von Ranke were followed by a description of an evening of mad carouse with Heine—a talk at Nohant with George Sand—scenes in the Duchesse de Broglie's salon—a contemptuous sketch of Guizot—a caustic sketch of Renan. Robert presently even laid aside his pipe, and stood in his favourite attitude, lounging against the mantelpiece, looking down, absorbed, on his visitor. All that intellectual passion which his struggle at Mile End had for the moment checked in him revived. Nay, after his weeks of exclusive contact with the most hideous forms of bodily ill, this interruption, these great names, this talk of great movements and great causes, had a special savour and relish. All the horizons of the mind expanded, the currents of the blood ran quicker.

Suddenly, however, he sprang up.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Wendover, it is too bad to interrupt you—I have enjoyed it immensely—but the fact is I have only two minutes to get to Sunday School in!"

Mr. Wendover rose also, and resumed his ordinary manner.

"It is I who should apologise," he said with stiff politeness, "for having encroached in this way on your busy day, Mr. Elsmere."

Robert helped him on with his coat, and then suddenly the squire turned to him.

"You were preaching this morning on one of the Isaiah quotations in St. Matthew. It would interest you, I imagine, to see a recent Jewish book on the subject of the prophecies quoted in the Gospels which reached me yesterday. There is nothing particularly new in it, but it looked to me well done."

"Thank you," said Robert, not, however, with any great heartiness, and the squire moved away. They parted at the gate, Robert running down the hill to the village as fast as his long legs could carry him.

"Sunday School—pshaw!" cried the squire, as he tramped homeward in the opposite direction.

Next morning a huge packing-case arrived from the Hall, and Robert could not forbear a little gloating over the treasures in it before he tore himself away to pay his morning visit to Mile End. There everything was improving; the poor Sharland child indeed had slipped away on the night after the squire's visit, but the other bad cases in the diphtheria ward were mending fast. John Allwood was gaining strength daily, and poor Mary Sharland was feebly struggling back to a life which seemed hardly worth so much effort to keep. Robert felt, with a welcome sense of slackening strain, that the daily and hourly superintendence which he and Catherine had been giving to the place might lawfully be relaxed, that the nurses on the spot were now more than equal to

their task, and after having made his round he raced home again in order to secure an hour with his books before luncheon.

The following day a note arrived, while they were at luncheon, in the squire's angular precise handwriting. It contained a request that, unless otherwise engaged, the rector would walk with Mr. Wendover that afternoon.

Robert flung it across to Catherine.

"Let me see," he said, deliberating, "have I any engagement I must keep?"

There was a sort of jealousy for his work within him contending with this new fascination of the squire's company. But, honestly, there was nothing in the way, and he went.

That walk was the first of many. The squire had no sooner convinced himself that young Elsmere's society did in reality provide him with a stimulus and recreation he had been too long without, than in his imperious wilful way he began to possess himself of it as much as possible. He never alluded to the trivial matters which had first separated and then united them. He worked the better, he thought the more clearly, for these talks and walks with Elsmere, and therefore these talks and walks became an object with him. They supplied a long-stifled want, the scholar's want of disciples, of some form of investment for all that heaped-up capital of thought he had been accumulating during a lifetime.

As for Robert, he soon felt himself so much under the spell of the squire's strange and powerful personality that he was forced to make a fight for it, lest this new claim should encroach upon the old ones. He would walk when the squire liked, but three times out of four these walks must be parish rounds, interrupted by de-

scents into cottages and chats in farmhouse parlours. The squire submitted. The neighbourhood began to wonder over the strange spectacle of Mr. Wendover waiting grimly in the winter dusk outside one of his own farmhouses while Elsmere was inside, or patrolling a bit of lane till Elsmere should have inquired after an invalid or beaten up a recruit for his confirmation class, dogged the while by stealthy children, with fingers in their mouths, who ran away in terror directly he turned.

Rumours of this new friendship spread. One day, on the bit of road between the Hall and the rectory, Lady Helen behind her ponies whirled past the two men, and her arch look at Elsmere said as plain as words, "Oh, you young wonder! what hook has served you with this leviathan?"

On another occasion, close to Churton, a man in a cassock and cloak came towards them. The squire put up his eyeglass.

"Humph!" he remarked; "do you know this merryandrew, Elsmere?"

It was Newcome. As they passed, Robert with slightly heightened colour gave him an affectionate nod and smile. Newcome's quick eye ran over the companions, he responded stiffly, and his step grew more rapid. A week or two later Robert noticed with a little prick of remorse that he had seen nothing of Newcome for an age. If Newcome would not come to him, he must go to Mottingham. He planned an expedition, but something happened to prevent it.

And Catherine? Naturally this new and most unexpected relation of Robert's to the man who had begun by insulting him was of considerable importance to the wife. In the first place it broke up to some extent the

exquisite *tête-à-tête* of their home life; it encroached often upon time that had always been hers; it filled Robert's mind more and more with matters in which she had no concern. All these things many wives might have resented. Catherine Elsmere resented none of them. It is probable, of course, that she had her natural moments of regret and comparison, when love said to itself a little sorely and hungrily, "It is hard to be even a fraction less to him than I once was!" But if so, these moments never betrayed themselves in word or act. Her tender common sense, her sweet humility, made her recognise at once Robert's need of intellectual comradeship, isolated as he was in this remote rural district. She knew perfectly that a clergyman's life of perpetual giving forth becomes morbid and unhealthy if there is not some corresponding taking in.

If only it had not been Mr. Wendover! She marvelled over the fascination Robert found in his dry cynical talk. She wondered that a Christian pastor could ever forget Mr. Wendover's antecedents; that the man who had nursed those sick children could forgive Mile End. All in all as they were to each other, she felt for the first time that she often understood her husband imperfectly. His mobility, his eagerness, were sometimes now a perplexity, even a pain to her.

It must not be imagined, however, that Robert let himself drift into this intellectual intimacy with one of the most distinguished of anti-Christian thinkers without reflecting on its possible consequences. The memory of that night of misery which *The Idols of the Market-place* had inflicted on him was enough. He was no match in controversy for Mr. Wendover, and he did not mean to attempt it.

One morning the squire unexpectedly plunged into an account of a German monograph he had just received on the subject of the Johannine authorship of the Fourth Gospel. It was almost the first occasion on which he had touched what may strictly be called the *matériel* of orthodoxy in their discussions—at any rate directly. But the book was a striking one, and in the interest of it he had clearly forgotten his ground a little. Suddenly the man who was walking beside him interrupted him.

“I think we ought to understand one another perhaps, Mr. Wendover,” Robert said, speaking under a quick sense of oppression, but with his usual dignity and bright courtesy. “I know your opinions, of course, from your books; you know what mine, as an honest man, must be, from the position I hold. My conscience does not forbid me to discuss anything, only—I am no match for you on points of scholarship, and I should just like to say once for all, that to me, whatever else is true, the religion of Christ is true. I am a Christian and a Christian minister. Therefore, whenever we come to discuss what may be called Christian evidence, I do it with reserves, which you would not have. I believe in an Incarnation, a Resurrection, a Revelation. If there are literary difficulties, I must want to smooth them away—you may want to make much of them. We come to the matter from different points of view. You will not quarrel with me for wanting to make it clear. It isn’t as if we differed slightly. We differ fundamentally—is it not so?”

The squire was walking beside him with bent shoulders, the lower lip pushed forward, as was usual with him when he was considering a matter with close attention, but did not mean to communicate his thoughts.

After a pause he said, with a faint inscrutable smile,—

"Your reminder is perfectly just. Naturally we all have our reserves. Neither of us can be expected to stultify his own."

And the talk went forward again, Robert joining in more buoyantly than ever, perhaps because he had achieved a necessary but disagreeable thing and got done with it.

In reality he had but been doing as the child does when it sets up its sand-barrier against the tide.

CHAPTER XXIII.

It was the beginning of April. The gorse was fast extending its golden empire over the commons. On the sunny slopes of the copses primroses were breaking through the hazel roots and beginning to gleam along the edges of the river. On the grass commons between Murewell and Mile End the birches rose like green clouds against the browns and purples of the still leafless oaks and beeches. The birds were twittering and building. Every day Robert was on the look-out for the swallows, or listening for the first notes of the nightingale amid the bare spring coverts.

But the spring was less perfectly delightful to him than it might have been, for Catherine was away. Mrs. Leyburn, who was to have come south to them in February, was attacked by bronchitis instead at Burwood and forbidden to move, even to a warmer climate. In March, Catherine, feeling restless and anxious about her mother, and thinking it hard that Agnes should have all the nursing and responsibility, tore herself from her man

and her baby, and went north to Whindale for a fortnight, leaving Robert forlorn.

Now, however, she was in London, whither she had gone for a few days on her way home, to meet Rose and to shop. Robert's opinion was that all women, even St. Elizabeths, have somewhere rooted in them an inordinate partiality for shopping; otherwise why should that operation take four or five mortal days? Surely with a little energy, one might buy up the whole of London in twelve hours! However, Catherine lingered, and as her purchases were made, Robert crossly supposed it must be all Rose's fault. He believed that Rose spent a great deal too much on dress.

Catherine's letters, of course, were full of her sister. Rose, she said, had come back from Berlin handsomer than ever, and playing, she supposed, magnificently. At any rate, the letters which followed her in shoals from Berlin flattered her to the skies, and during the three months preceding her return Joachim himself had taken her as a pupil and given her unusual attention.

"And now, of course," wrote Catherine, "she is desperately disappointed that mamma and Agnes cannot join her in town, as she had hoped. She does her best, I know, poor child, to conceal it and to feel as she ought about mamma, but I can see that the idea of an indefinite time at Burwood is intolerable to her. As to Berlin, I think she has enjoyed it, but she talks very scornfully of German *Schwärmerei* and German women, and she tells the oddest stories of her professors. With one or two of them she seems to have been in a state of war from the beginning; but some of them, my dear Robert, I am persuaded were just simply in love with her!

"I don't—no, I never *shall* believe, that independent

exciting student's life is good for a girl. But I never say so to Rose. When she forgets to be irritable and to feel that the world is going against her, she is often very sweet to me, and I can't bear there should be any conflict."

His next day's letter contained the following:—

"Are you properly amused, sir, at your wife's performances in town? Our three concerts you have heard all about. I still can't get over them. I go about haunted by the *seriousness*, the life-and-death interest people throw into music. It is astonishing! And outside, as we got into our hansom, such sights and sounds!—such starved fierce-looking men, such ghastly women!

"But since then Rose has been taking me into society. Yesterday afternoon, after I wrote to you, we went to see Rose's artistic friends—the Piersons—with whom she was staying last summer, and to-day we have even called on Lady Charlotte Wynnstay.

"As to Mrs. Pierson, I never saw such an odd bundle of ribbons and rags and queer embroideries as she looked when we called. However, Rose says that, for 'an æsthete'—she despises them now herself—Mrs. Pierson has wonderful taste, and that her wall-papers and her gowns, if I only understood them, are not the least like those of other æsthetic persons, but very *recherché*—which may be. She talked to Rose of nothing but acting, especially of Madame Desforêts. No one, according to her, has anything to do with an actress's private life, or ought to take it into account. But, Robert, dear,—an actress is a woman, and has a soul!

"Then Lady Charlotte,—you would have laughed at our *entrée*.

"We found she was in town, and went on her 'day,'

as she had asked Rose to do. The room was rather dark—none of these London rooms seem to me to have any light and air in them. The butler got our names wrong, and I marched in first, more shy than I ever have been before in my life. Lady Charlotte had two gentlemen with her. She evidently did not know me in the least; she stood staring at me with her eyeglass on, and her cap so crooked I could think of nothing but a wish to put it straight. Then Rose followed, and in a few minutes it seemed to me as though it were Rose who were hostess, talking to the two gentlemen and being kind to Lady Charlotte. I am sure everybody in the room was amused by her self-possession, Lady Charlotte included. The gentlemen stared at her a great deal, and Lady Charlotte paid her one or two compliments on her looks, which *I* thought she would not have ventured to pay to any one in her own circle.

“We stayed about half an hour. One of the gentlemen was, I believe, a member of the Government, an under-secretary for something, but he and Rose and Lady Charlotte talked again of nothing but musicians and actors. It is strange that politicians should have time to know so much of these things. The other gentleman reminded me of Hotspur’s popinjay. I think now I made out that he wrote for the newspapers, but at the moment I should have felt it insulting to accuse him of anything so humdrum as an occupation in life. He discovered somehow that I had an interest in the Church, and he asked me, leaning back in his chair and lisping, whether I really thought ‘the Church could still totter on a while in the rural dithtricts.’ He was informed her condition was so ‘vewy dethperate.’

“Then I laughed outright, and found my tongue.

Perhaps his next article on the Church will have a few facts in it. I did my best to put some into him. Rose at last looked round at me, astonished. But he did not dislike me, I think. I was not impertinent to him, husband mine. If I might have described just *one* of your days to his high-and-mightiness! There is no need to tell you, I think, whether I did or not.

"Then when we got up to go, Lady Charlotte asked Rose to stay with her. Rose explained why she couldn't, and Lady Charlotte pitied her dreadfully for having a family, and the under-secretary said that it was one's first duty in life to trample on one's relations, and that he hoped nothing would prevent his hearing her play some time later in the year. Rose said very decidedly she should be in town for the winter. Lady Charlotte said she would have an evening specially for her, and as I said nothing, we got away at last."

The letter of the following day recorded a little adventure:—

"I was much startled this morning. I had got Rose to come with me to the National Gallery on our way to her dressmaker. We were standing before Raphael's 'Vigil of the Knight,' when suddenly I saw Rose, who was looking away towards the door into the long gallery, turn perfectly white. I followed her eyes, and there, in the doorway, disappearing,—I am almost certain,—was Mr. Langham! One cannot mistake his walk or his profile. Before I could say a word Rose had walked away to another wall of pictures, and when we joined again we did not speak of it. Did he see us, I wonder, and purposely avoid us? Something made me think so.

"Oh, I wish I could believe she had forgotten him! I am certain she would laugh me to angry scorn if I

mentioned him; but there she sits by the fire now, while I am writing, quite drooping and pale, because she thinks I am not noticing. If she did but love me a little more! It must be my fault, I know.

“Yes, as you say, Burwood may as well be shut up or let. My dear, dear father!”

Robert could imagine the sigh with which Catherine had laid down her pen. Dear tender soul, with all its old-world fidelities and pieties pure and unimpaired! He raised the signature to his lips.

Next day Catherine came back to him. Robert had no words too opprobrious for the widowed condition from which her return had rescued him. It seemed to Catherine, however, that life had been very full and keen with him since her departure! He lingered with her after supper, vowing that his club boys might make what hay in the study they pleased; he was going to tell her the news, whatever happened.

“I told you of my two dinners at the Hall? The first was just *tête-à-tête* with the squire—oh, and Mrs. Darcy, of course. I am always forgetting her, poor little thing, which is most ungrateful of me. A pathetic life that, Catherine. She seems to me, in her odd way, perpetually hungering for affection, for praise. No doubt, if she got them, she wouldn't know what to do with them. She would just touch and leave them as she does everything. Her talk and she are both as light and wandering as thistledown. But still, meanwhile, she hungers, and is never satisfied. There seems to be something peculiarly antipathetic in her to the squire. I can't make it out. He is sometimes quite brutal to her when she is more inconsequent than usual. I often wonder she goes on living with him.”

Catherine made some indignant comment.

"Yes," said Robert, musing. "Yes, it is bad."

But Catherine thought his tone might have been more unqualified, and marvelled again at the curious lenity of judgment he had always shown of late towards Mr. Wendover. And all his judgments of himself and others were generally so quick, so uncompromising!

"On the second occasion we had Freake and Dashwood," naming two well-known English antiquarians. "Very learned, very jealous, and very snuffy; altogether 'too genuine,' as poor mother used to say of those old chairs we got for the dining-room. But afterwards when we were all smoking in the library, the squire came out of his shell and talked. I never heard him more brilliant!"

He paused a moment, his bright eyes looking far away from her, as though fixed on the scene he was describing.

"Such a mind!" he said at last with a long breath, "such a memory! Catherine, my book has been making great strides since you left. With Mr. Wendover to go to, all the problems are simplified. One is saved all false starts, all beating about the bush. What a piece of luck it was that put one down beside such a guide, such a living storehouse of knowledge!"

He spoke in a glow of energy and enthusiasm. Catherine sat looking at him wistfully, her gray eyes crossed by many varying shades of memory and feeling.

At last his look met hers, and the animation of it softened at once, grew gentle.

"Do you think I am making knowledge too much of a god just now, Madonna mine?" he said, throwing himself down beside her. "I have been full of qualms

myself. The squire excites one so, makes one feel as though intellect—accumulation—were the whole of life. But I struggle against it—I do. I go on, for instance, trying to make the squire do his social duties—behave like ‘a human.’”

Catherine could not help smiling at his tone.

“Well?” she inquired.

He shook his head ruefully.

“The squire is a tough customer—most men of sixty-seven with strong wills are, I suppose. At any rate, he is like one of the Thurston trout—sees through all my manœuvres. But one piece of news will astonish you, Catherine!” And he sprang up to deliver it with effect. “Henslowe is dismissed.”

“Henslowe dismissed!” Catherine sat properly amazed while Robert told the story.

The dismissal of Henslowe indeed represented the price which Mr. Wendover had been so far willing to pay for Elsmere’s society. Some *quid pro quo* there must be—that he was prepared to admit—considering their relative positions as squire and parson. But, as Robert shrewdly suspected, not one of his wiles so far had imposed on the master of Murewell. He had his own sarcastic smiles over them, and over Elsmere’s pastoral *naïveté* in general. The evidences of the young rector’s power and popularity were, however, on the whole, pleasant to Mr. Wendover. If Elsmere had his will with all the rest of the world, Mr. Wendover knew perfectly well who it was that at the present moment had his will with Elsmere. He had found a great piquancy in this shaping of a mind more intellectually eager and pliant than any he had yet come across among younger men; perpetual food too, for his sense of irony, in the intel-

lectual contradictions, wherein Elsmere's developing ideas and information were now, according to the squire, involving him at every turn.

"His religious foundations are gone already, if he did but know it," Mr. Wendover grimly remarked to himself one day about this time, "but he will take so long finding it out that the results are not worth speculating on."

Cynically assured, therefore, at bottom of his own power with this ebullient nature, the squire was quite prepared to make external concessions, or, as we have said, to pay his price. It annoyed him that when Elsmere would press for allotment land, or a new institute, or a better supply of water for the village, it was not open to him merely to give *carte blanche*, and refer his petitioner to Henslowe. Robert's opinion of Henslowe, and Henslowe's now more cautious but still incessant hostility to the rector, were patent at last even to the squire. The situation was worrying and wasted time. It must be changed.

So one morning he met Elsmere with a bundle of letters in his hand, calmly informed him that Henslowe had been sent about his business, and that it would be a kindness if Mr. Elsmere would do him the favour of looking through some applications for the vacant post just received.

Elsmere, much taken by surprise, felt at first as it was natural for an over-sensitive, over-scrupulous man to feel. His enemy had been given into his hand, and instead of victory he could only realise that he had brought a man to ruin.

"He has a wife and children," he said quickly, looking at the squire.

"Of course I have pensioned him," replied the squire

impatiently; "otherwise I imagine he would be hanging round our necks to the end of the chapter."

There was something in the careless indifference of the tone which sent a shiver through Elsmere. After all, this man had served the squire for fifteen years, and it was not Mr. Wendover who had much to complain of.

No one with a conscience could have held out a finger to keep Henslowe in his post. But though Elsmere took the letters and promised to give them his best attention, as soon as he got home he made himself irrationally miserable over the matter. It was not his fault that, from the moment of his arrival in the parish, Henslowe had made him the target of a vulgar and embittered hostility, and so far as he had struck out in return it had been for the protection of persecuted and defenceless creatures. But all the same, he could not get the thought of the man's collapse and humiliation out of his mind. How at his age was he to find other work, and how was he to endure life at Murewell without his comfortable house, his easy command of spirits, and the cringing of the farmers?

Tormented by the sordid misery of the situation almost as though it had been his own, Elsmere ran down impulsively in the evening to the agent's house. Could nothing be done to assure the man that he was not really his enemy, and that anything the parson's influence and the parson's money could do to help him to a more decent life, and work which offered fewer temptations and less power over human beings, should be done?

It need hardly be said that the visit was a complete failure. Henslowe, who was drinking hard, no sooner heard Elsmere's voice in the little hall than he dashed open the door which separated them, and, in a paroxysm

of drunken rage, hurled at Elsmere all the venomous stuff he had been garnering up for months against some such occasion. The vilest abuse, the foulest charges—there was nothing that the maddened sot, now fairly unmasked, denied himself. Elsmere, pale and erect, tried to make himself heard. In vain. Henslowe was physically incapable of taking in a word.

At last the agent, beside himself, made a rush, his three untidy children, who had been hanging open-mouthed in the background, set up a howl of terror, and his Scotch wife, more pinched and sour than ever, who had been so far a gloomy spectator of the scene, interposed.

“Have doon wi’ ye,” she said sullenly, putting out a long bony arm in front of her husband, “or I’ll just lock oop that brandy where ye’ll naw find it if ye pull the house doon. Now, sir,” turning to Elsmere, “would ye jest be going? Ye mean it weel, I daur say, but ye’ve doon yer wark, and ye maun leave it.”

And she motioned him out, not without a sombre dignity. Elsmere went home crestfallen. The enthusiast is a good deal too apt to under-estimate the stubbornness of moral fact, and these rebuffs have their stern uses for character.

“They intend to go on living here, I am told,” Elsmere said, as he wound up the story, “and as Henslowe is still churchwarden, he may do us a world of mischief yet. However, I think that wife will keep him in order. No doubt vengeance would be sweet to her as to him, but she has a shrewd eye, poor soul, to the squire’s remittances. It is a wretched business, and I don’t take a man’s hate easily, Catherine!—though it may be a folly to say so.”

Catherine was irresponsive. The Old Testament element in her found a lawful satisfaction in Henslowe's fall, and a wicked man's hatred, according to her, mattered only to himself. The squire's conduct, on the other hand, made her uneasily proud. To her, naturally, it simply meant that he was falling under Robert's spell. So much the better for him, but——

CHAPTER XXIV.

THAT same afternoon Robert started on a walk to a distant farm, where one of his Sunday-school boys lay recovering from rheumatic fever. The rector had his pocket full of articles—a story-book in one, a puzzle map in the other—destined for Master Carter's amusement. On the way he was to pick up Mr. Wendover at the park gates.

It was a delicious April morning. A soft west wind blew through leaf and grass——

“Driving sweet buds, like flocks, to feed in air.”

The spring was stirring everywhere, and Robert raced along, feeling in every vein a life, an ebullience akin to that of nature. As he neared the place of meeting it occurred to him that the squire had been unusually busy lately, unusually silent and absent too on their walks. What *was* he always at work on? Robert had often inquired of him as to the nature of those piles of proof and manuscript with which his table was littered. The squire had never given any but the most general answer, and had always changed the subject. There was an invincible *personal* reserve about him which, through all his walks and talks with Elsmere, had never as yet broken

down. He would talk of other men and other men's labours by the hour, but not of his own. Elsmere reflected on the fact, mingling with the reflection a certain humorous scorn of his own constant openness and readiness to take counsel with the world.

"However, *this* book isn't a mere excuse, as Langham's is," Elsmere inwardly remarked. "Langham, in a certain sense, plays even with learning; Mr. Wendover plays at nothing."

By the way, he had a letter from Langham in his pocket much more cheerful and human than usual. Let him look through it again.

Not a word, of course, of that National Gallery experience!—a circumstance, however, which threw no light on it either way.

"I find myself a good deal reconciled to life by this migration of mine," wrote Langham. "Now that my enforced duties to them are all done with, my fellow-creatures seem to me much more decent fellows than before. The great stir of London, in which, unless I please, I have no part whatever, attracts me more than I could have thought possible. No one in these noisy streets has any rightful claim upon me. I have cut away at one stroke lectures, and Boards of Studies, and tutors' meetings, and all the rest of the wearisome Oxford make-believe, and the creature left behind feels lighter and nimbler than he has felt for years. I go to concerts and theatres; I look at the people in the streets; I even begin to take an outsider's interest in social questions, in the puny dykes which well-meaning people are trying to raise all round us against the encroaching, devastating labour-troubles of the future. By dint of running away from life, I may end by cutting a much more passable figure

in it than before. Be consoled, my dear Elsmere; reconsider your remonstrances."

There, under the great cedar by the gate, stood Mr. Wendover. Illumined as he was by the spring sunshine, he struck Elsmere as looking unusually shrunken and old. And yet under the look of physical exhaustion there was a new serenity, almost a peacefulness of expression, which gave the whole man a different aspect.

"Don't take me far," he said abruptly, as they started. "I have not got the energy for it. I have been overworking, and must go away."

"I have been sure of it for some time," said Elsmere warmly. "You ought to have a long rest. But mayn't I know, Mr. Wendover, before you take it, what this great task is you have been toiling at? Remember, you have never told me a word of it."

And Elsmere's smile had in it a touch of most friendly reproach. Fatigue had left the scholar relaxed, comparatively defenceless. His sunk and wrinkled eyes lit up with a smile, faint indeed, but of unwonted softness.

"A task indeed," he said with a sigh, "the task of a lifetime. To-day I finished the second third of it. Probably before the last section is begun some interloping German will have stepped down before me; it is the way of the race! But for the moment there is the satisfaction of having come to an end of some sort—a natural halt, at any rate."

Elsmere's eyes were still interrogative. "Oh, well," said the squire hastily, "it is a book I planned just after I took my doctor's degree at Berlin. It struck me then as the great want of modern scholarship. It is a History

of Evidence, or rather, more strictly, 'A History of *Testimony*.' "

Robert started. The library flashed into his mind, and Langham's figure in the long gray coat sitting on the stool.

"A great subject," he said slowly, "a magnificent subject. How have you conceived it, I wonder?"

"Simply from the standpoint of evolution, of development. The philosophical value of the subject is enormous. You must have considered it, of course; every historian must. But few people have any idea in detail of the amount of light which the history of human witness in the world, systematically carried through, throws on the history of the human mind; that is to say, on the history of ideas."

The squire paused, his keen scrutinising look dwelling on the face beside him, as though to judge whether he were understood.

"Oh, true!" cried Elsmere; "most true. Now I know what vague want it is that has been haunting me for months——"

He stopped short, his look, aglow with all the young thinker's ardour, fixed on the squire.

The squire received the outburst in silence—a somewhat ambiguous silence.

"But go on," said Elsmere; "please go on."

"Well, you remember," said the squire slowly, "that when Tractarianism began I was for a time one of Newman's victims. Then, when Newman departed, I went over body and bones to the Liberal reaction which followed his going. In the first ardour of what seemed to me a release from slavery I migrated to Berlin, in search of knowledge which there was no getting in England,

and there, with the taste of a dozen aimless theological controversies still in my mouth, this idea first took hold of me. It was simply this:—Could one through an exhaustive examination of human records, helped by modern physiological and mental science, get at the conditions, physical and mental, which govern the greater or lesser correspondence between human witness and the fact it reports?”

“A giant’s task!” cried Robert; “hardly conceivable!”

The squire smiled slightly—the smile of a man who looks back with indulgent half melancholy satire on the rash ambitions of his youth.

“Naturally,” he resumed, “I soon saw I must restrict myself to European testimony, and that only up to the Renaissance. To do that, of course, I had to dig into the East, to learn several Oriental languages—Sanskrit among them. Hebrew I already knew. Then, when I had got my languages, I began to work steadily through the whole mass of existing records, sifting and comparing. It is thirty years since I started. Fifteen years ago I finished the section dealing with classical antiquity—with India, Persia, Egypt, and Judæa. To-day I have put the last strokes to a History of Testimony from the Christian era down to the sixth century—from Livy to Gregory of Tours, from Augustus to Justinian.”

Elsmere turned to him with wonder, with a movement of irrepressible homage. Thirty years of unbroken solitary labour for one end, one cause! In our hurried fragmentary life, a purpose of this tenacity, this power of realising itself, strikes the imagination.

“And your two books?”

“Were a mere interlude,” replied the squire briefly.

"After the completion of the first part of my work, there were certain deposits left in me which it was a relief to get rid of, especially in connection with my renewed impressions of England," he added drily.

Elsmere was silent, thinking this then was the explanation of the squire's minute and exhaustive knowledge of the early Christian centuries, a knowledge into which—apart from certain forbidden topics—he had himself dipped so freely. Suddenly, as he mused, there awoke in the young man a new hunger, a new unmanageable impulse towards frankness of speech. All his nascent intellectual powers were alive and clamorous. For the moment his past reticences and timidities looked to him absurd. The mind rebelled against the barriers it had been rearing against itself. It rushed on to sweep them away, crying out that all this shrinking from free discussion had been at bottom "a mere treason to faith."

"Naturally, Mr. Wendover," he said at last, and his tone had a half-defiant, half-nervous energy, "you have given your best attention all these years to the Christian problems."

"Naturally," said the squire drily. Then, as his companion still seemed to wait, keenly expectant, he resumed, with something cynical in the smile which accompanied the words,—

"But I have no wish to infringe our convention."

"A convention was it?" replied Elsmere, flushing. "I think I only wanted to make my own position clear and prevent misunderstanding. But it is impossible that I should be indifferent to the results of thirty years' such work as you can give to so great a subject."

The squire drew himself up a little under his cloak and seemed to consider. His tired eyes, fixed on the

spring lane before them, saw in reality only the long retrospects of the past. Then a light broke in them, transformed them—a light of battle. He turned to the man beside him, and his sharp look swept over him from head to foot. Well, if he would have it, let him have it. He had been contemptuously content so far to let the subject be. But Mr. Wendover, in spite of his philosophy, had never been proof all his life against an anti-clerical instinct worthy almost of a Paris municipal councillor. In spite of his fatigue there woke in him a kind of cruel whimsical pleasure at the notion of speaking, once for all, what he conceived to be the whole bare truth to this clever attractive dreamer, to the young fellow who thought he could condescend to science from the standpoint of the Christian miracles!

“Results?” he said interrogatively. “Well, as you will understand, it is tolerably difficult to summarise such a mass at a moment’s notice. But I can give you the lines of my last volumes, if it would interest you to hear them.”

That walk prolonged itself far beyond Mr. Wendover’s original intention. There was something in the situation, in Elsmere’s comments, or arguments, or silences, which after a while banished the scholar’s sense of exhaustion and made him oblivious of the country distances. No man feels another’s soul quivering and struggling in his grasp without excitement, let his nerve and his self-restraint be what they may.

As for Elsmere, that hour and a half, little as he realised it at the time, represented the turning-point of life. He listened, he suggested, he put in an acute remark here, an argument there, such as the squire had often difficulty in meeting. Every now and then the

inner protest of an attacked faith would break through in words so full of poignancy, in imagery so dramatic, that the squire's closely-knit sentences would be for the moment wholly disarranged. On the whole, he proved himself no mean guardian of all that was most sacred to himself and to Catherine, and the squire's intellectual respect for him rose considerably.

All the same, by the end of their conversation that first period of happy unclouded youth we have been considering was over for poor Elsmere. In obedience to certain inevitable laws and instincts of the mind, he had been for months tempting his fate, inviting catastrophe. None the less did the first sure approaches of that catastrophe fill him with a restless resistance which was in itself anguish.

As to the squire's talk, it was simply the outpouring of one of the richest, most sceptical, and most highly-trained of minds on the subject of Christian origins. At no previous period of his life would it have greatly affected Elsmere. But now at every step the ideas, impressions, arguments bred in him by his months of historical work and ordinary converse with the squire rushed in, as they had done once before, to cripple resistance, to check an emerging answer, to justify Mr. Wendover.

We may quote a few fragmentary utterances taken almost at random from the long wrestle of the two men, for the sake of indicating the main lines of a bitter after-struggle.

"Testimony like every other human product has *developed*. Man's power of apprehending and recording what he sees and hears has grown from less to more,

from weaker to stronger, like any other of his faculties, just as the reasoning powers of the cave-dweller have developed into the reasoning powers of a Kant. What one wants is the ordered proof of this, and it can be got from history and experience."

"To plunge into the Christian period without having first cleared the mind as to what is meant in history and literature by 'the critical method,' which in history may be defined as the 'science of what is credible,' and in literature as 'the science of what is rational,' is to invite fiasco. The theologian in such a state sees no obstacle to accepting an arbitrary list of documents with all the strange stuff they may contain, and declaring them to be sound historical material, while he applies to all the strange stuff of a similar kind surrounding them the most rigorous principles of modern science. Or he has to make believe that the reasoning processes exhibited in the speeches of the Acts, in certain passages of St. Paul's Epistles, or in the Old Testament quotations in the Gospels, have a validity for the mind of the nineteenth century, when in truth they are the imperfect, half-childish products of the mind of the first century, of quite insignificant or indirect value to the historian of fact, of enormous value to the historian of *testimony* and its varieties."

"Suppose, for instance, before I begin to deal with Christian story, and the earliest Christian development, I try to make out beforehand what are the moulds, the channels into which the testimony of the time must run. I look for these moulds, of course, in the dominant ideas,

the intellectual preconceptions and preoccupations existing when the period begins.

“In the first place, I shall find present in the age which saw the birth of Christianity, as in so many other ages, a universal preconception in favour of miracle—that is to say, of deviations from the common norm of experience, governing the work of *all* men of *all* schools. Very well, allow for it then. Read the testimony of the period in the light of it. Be prepared for the inevitable differences between it and the testimony of your own day. The witness of the time is not true, nor, in the strict sense, false. It is merely incompetent, half-trained, pre-scientific, but all through perfectly natural. The wonder would have been to have had a life of Christ without miracles. The air teems with them. The East is full of Messiahs. Even a Tacitus is superstitious. Even a Vespasian works miracles. Even a Nero cannot die, but fifty years after his death is still looked for as the inaugurator of a millennium of horror. The Resurrection is partly invented, partly imagined, partly ideally true—in any case wholly intelligible and natural, as a product of the age, when once you have the key of that age.

“In the next place, look for the preconceptions that have a definite historical origin; those, for instance, flowing from the pre-Christian, apocalyptic literature of the Jews, taking the Maccabean legend of Daniel as the centre of inquiry—those flowing from Alexandrian Judaism and the school of Philo—those flowing from the Palestinian schools of exegesis. Examine your synoptic gospels, your Gospel of St. John, your Apocalypse, in the light of these. You have no other chance of understanding them. But so examined, they fall into place,

become explicable and rational; such material as science can make full use of. The doctrine of the Divinity of Christ, Christian eschatology, and Christian views of prophecy will also have found *their* place in a sound historical scheme!"

"It is discreditable now for the man of intelligence to refuse to read his Livy in the light of his Mommsen. My object has been to help in making it discreditable to him to refuse to read his Christian documents in the light of a trained scientific criticism. We shall have made some positive advance in rationality when the man who is perfectly capable of dealing sanely with legend in one connection, and, in another, will insist on confounding it with history proper, cannot do so any longer without losing caste, without falling *ipso facto* out of court with men of education. It is enough for a man of letters if he has helped ever so little in the final staking out of the boundaries between reason and unreason!"

And so on. These are mere ragged gleanings from an ample store. The discussion in reality ranged over the whole field of history, plunged into philosophy, and into the subtlest problems of mind. At the end of it, after he had been conscious for many bitter moments of that same constriction of heart which had overtaken him once before at Mr. Wendover's hands, the religious passion in Elsmere once more rose with sudden stubborn energy against the iron negations pressed upon it.

"I will not fight you any more, Mr. Wendover," he said, with his moved flashing look. "I am perfectly conscious that my own mental experience of the last two years has made it necessary to re-examine some of these

intellectual foundations of faith. But as to the faith itself, that is its own witness. It does not depend, after all, upon anything external, but upon the living voice of the Eternal in the soul of man!"

Involuntarily his pace quickened. The whole man was gathered into one great, useless, pitiful defiance, and the outer world was forgotten. The squire kept up with difficulty a while, a faint glimmer of sarcasm playing now and then round the straight thin-lipped mouth. Then suddenly he stopped.

"No, let it be. Forget me and my book, Elsmere. Everything can be got out of in this world. By the way, we seem to have reached the ends of the earth. Those are the new Mile End cottages, I believe. With your leave, I'll sit down in one of them, and send to the Hall for the carriage."

Elsmere's repentant attention was drawn at once to his companion.

"I am a selfish idiot," he said hotly, "to have led you into over-walking and over-talking like this."

The squire made some short reply and instantly turned the matter off. The momentary softness which had marked his meeting with Elsmere had entirely vanished, leaving only the Mr. Wendover of every day, who was merely made awkward and unapproachable by the slightest touch of personal sympathy. No living being, certainly not his foolish little sister, had any *right* to take care of the squire. And as the signs of age became more apparent, this one fact had often worked powerfully on the sympathies of Elsmere's chivalrous youth, though as yet he had been no more capable than any one else of breaking through the squire's haughty reserve.

As they turned down the newly-worn track to the cottages, whereof the weekly progress had been for some time the delight of Elsmere's heart, they met old Meyrick in his pony-carriage. He stopped his shambling steed at sight of the pair. The bleared spectacled eyes lit up, the prim mouth broke into a smile which matched the April sun.

"Well, Squire; well, Mr. Elsmere, are you going to have a look at those places? Never saw such palaces. I only hope I may end my days in anything so good. Will you give me a lease, Squire?"

Mr. Wendover's deep eyes took a momentary survey, half indulgent, half contemptuous, of the naïve, awkward-looking old creature in the pony-carriage. Then, without troubling to find an answer, he went his way.

Robert stayed chatting a moment or two, knowing perfectly well what Meyrick's gay garrulity meant. A sharp and bitter sense of the ironies of life swept across him. The squire humanised, influenced by him—he knew that was the image in Meyrick's mind; he remembered with a quiet scorn its presence in his own. And never, never had he felt his own weakness and the strength of that grim personality so much as at that instant.

That evening Catherine noticed an unusual silence and depression in Robert. She did her best to cheer it away, to get at the cause of it. In vain. At last, with her usual wise tenderness, she left him alone, conscious herself, as she closed the study door behind her, of a momentary dreariness of soul, coming she knew not whence, and only dispersed by the instinctive upward leap of prayer.

Robert was no sooner alone than he put down his pipe and sat brooding over the fire. All the long debate

of the afternoon began to fight itself out again in the shrinking mind. Suddenly, in his restless pain, a thought occurred to him. He had been much struck in the squire's conversation by certain allusions to arguments drawn from the Book of Daniel. It was not a subject with which Robert had great familiarity. He remembered his Pusey dimly, certain Divinity lectures, an article of Westcott's.

He raised his hand quickly and took down the monograph on *The Use of the Old Testament in the New*, which the squire had sent him in the earliest days of their acquaintance. A secret dread and repugnance had held him from it till now. Curiously enough it was not he but Catherine, as we shall see, who had opened it first. Now, however, he got it down and turned to the section on Daniel.

It was a change of conviction on the subject of the date and authorship of this strange product of Jewish patriotism in the second century before Christ that drove M. Renan out of the Church of Rome. "For the Catholic Church to confess," he says in his *Souvenirs*, "that Daniel is an apocryphal book of the time of the Maccabees, would be to confess that she had made a mistake; if she had made this mistake, she may have made others; she is no longer divinely inspired."

The Protestant, who is in truth more bound to the Book of Daniel than M. Renan, has various ways of getting over the difficulties raised against the supposed authorship of the book by modern criticism. Robert found all these ways enumerated in the brilliant and vigorous pages of the book before him.

In the first place, like the orthodox Saint-Sulpicien, the Protestant meets the critic with a flat *non possumus*.

"Your arguments are useless and irrelevant," he says in effect. "However plausible may be your objections, the Book of Daniel *is* what it professes to be, *because* our Lord quoted it in such a manner as to distinctly recognise its authority. The All-True and All-Knowing cannot have made a mistake, nor can He have expressly led His disciples to regard as genuine and Divine, prophecies which were in truth the inventions of an ingenious romancer."

But the liberal Anglican—the man, that is to say, whose logical sense is inferior to his sense of literary probabilities—proceeds quite differently.

"Your arguments are perfectly just," he says to the critic; "the book is a patriotic fraud, of no value except to the historian of literature. But how do you know that our Lord quoted it as *true* in the strict sense? In fact He quoted it as *literature*, as a Greek might have quoted Homer, as an Englishman might quote Shakespeare."

And many a harassed Churchman takes refuge forthwith in the new explanation. It is very difficult, no doubt, to make the passages in the Gospels agree with it, but at the bottom of his mind there is a saving silent scorn for the old theories of inspiration. He admits to himself that probably Christ was not correctly reported in the matter.

Then appears the critic, having no interests to serve, no *parti pris* to defend, and states the matter calmly, dispassionately, as it appears to him. "No reasonable man," says the ablest German exponent of the Book of Daniel, "can doubt"—that this most interesting piece of writing belongs to the year 169 or 170 B.C. It was written to stir up the courage and patriotism of the Jews, weighed down by the persecutions of Antiochus Epi-

phanes. It had enormous vogue. It inaugurated a new Apocalyptic literature. And clearly the youth of Jesus of Nazareth was vitally influenced by it. It entered into his thought, it helped to shape his career.

But Elsmere did not trouble himself much with the critic, as at any rate he was reported by the author of the book before him. Long before the critical case was reached, he had flung the book heavily from him. The mind accomplished its further task without help from outside. In the stillness of the night there rose up weirdly before him a whole new mental picture—effacing, pushing out, innumerable older images of thought. It was the image of a purely human Christ—a purely human, explicable, yet always wonderful Christianity. It broke his heart, but the spell of it was like some dream-country wherein we see all the familiar objects of life in new relations and perspectives. He gazed upon it fascinated, the wailing underneath checked a while by the strange beauty and order of the emerging spectacle. Only a little while! Then with a groan Elsmere looked up, his eyes worn, his lips white and set.

“I must face it—I must face it through! God help me!”

A slight sound overhead in Catherine’s room sent a sudden spasm of feeling through the young face. He threw himself down, hiding from his own foresight of what was to be.

“My darling, my darling! But she shall know nothing of it—yet.”

CHAPTER XXV.

AND he did face it through.

The next three months were the bitterest months of Elsmere's life. They were marked by anguished mental struggle, by a consciousness of painful separation from the soul nearest to his own, and by a constantly increasing sense of oppression, of closing avenues and narrowing alternatives, which for weeks together seemed to hold the mind in a grip whence there was no escape.

That struggle was not hurried and embittered by the bodily presence of the squire. Mr. Wendover went off to Italy a few days after the conversation we have described. But though he was not present in the flesh the great book of his life was in Elsmere's hands, he had formally invited Elsmere's remarks upon it; and the air of Murewell seemed still echoing with his sentences, still astir with his thoughts. That curious instinct of pursuit, that avid imperious wish to crush an irritating resistance, which his last walk with Elsmere had first awakened in him with any strength, persisted. He wrote to Robert from abroad, and the proud fastidious scholar had never taken more pains with anything than with those letters.

Robert might have stopped them, might have cast the whole matter from him with one resolute effort. In other relations he had will enough and to spare.

Was it an unexpected weakness of fibre that made it impossible?—that had placed him in this way at the squire's disposal? Half the world would answer yes. Might not the other half plead that in every generation there is a minority of these mobile, impressionable, defenceless natures, who are ultimately at the mercy of ex-

perience, at the mercy of thought, at the mercy (shall we say?) of truth; and that, in fact, it is from this minority that all human advance comes?

During these three miserable months it cannot be said—poor Elsmere!—that he attempted any systematic study of Christian evidence. His mind was too much torn, his heart too sore. He pounced feverishly on one test point after another, on the Pentateuch, the Prophets, the relation of the New Testament to the thoughts and beliefs of its time, the Gospel of St. John, the evidence as to the Resurrection, the intellectual and moral conditions surrounding the formation of the Canon. His mind swayed hither and thither, driven from each resting-place in turn by the pressure of some new difficulty. And—let it be said again—all through, the only constant element in the whole dismal process was his trained historical sense. If he had gone through this conflict at Oxford, for instance, he would have come out of it unscathed; for he would simply have remained throughout it ignorant of the true problems at issue. As it was, the keen instrument he had sharpened so laboriously on indifferent material now ploughed its agonising way, bit by bit, into the most intimate recesses of thought and faith.

Much of the actual struggle he was able to keep from Catherine's view, as he had vowed to himself to keep it. For after the squire's departure Mrs. Darcy too went joyously up to London to flutter a while through the golden alleys of May-fair; and Elsmere was left once more in undisturbed possession of the Murewell library. There for a while on every day—oh, pitiful relief!—he could hide himself from the eyes he loved.

But, after all, married love allows of nothing but the shallowest concealments. Catherine had already had

one or two alarms. Once, in Robert's study, among a tumbled mass of books he had pulled out in search of something missing, and which she was putting in order, she had come across that very book on the Prophecies which at a critical moment had so deeply affected Elsmere. It lay open, and Catherine was caught by the heading of a section: "The Messianic Idea."

She began to read, mechanically at first, and read about a page. That page so shocked a mind accustomed to a purely traditional and mystical interpretation of the Bible that the book dropped abruptly from her hand, and she stood a moment by her husband's table, her fine face pale and frowning.

She noticed, with bitterness, Mr. Wendover's name on the title-page. Was it right for Robert to have such books? Was it wise, was it prudent, for the Christian to measure himself against such antagonism as this? She wrestled painfully with the question. "Oh, but I can't understand," she said to herself with an almost agonised energy. "It is I who am timid, faithless! He *must*—he *must*—know what they say; he must have gone through the dark places if he is to carry others through them."

So she stilled and trampled on the inward protest. She yearned to speak of it to Robert, but something withheld her. In her passionate wifely trust she could not bear to seem to question the use he made of his time and thought; and a delicate moral scruple warned her she might easily allow her dislike of the Wendover friendship to lead her into exaggeration and injustice.

But the stab of that moment recurred—dealt now by one slight incident, now by another. And after the squire's departure Catherine suddenly realised that the whole atmosphere of their home-life was changed.

Robert was giving himself to his people with a more scrupulous energy than ever. Never had she seen him so pitiful, so full of heart for every human creature. His sermons, with their constant imaginative dwelling on the earthly life of Jesus, affected her now with a poignancy, a pathos, which were almost unbearable. And his tenderness to *her* was beyond words. But with that tenderness there was constantly mixed a note of remorse, a painful self-depreciation which she could hardly notice in speech, but which every now and then wrung her heart. And in his parish work he often showed a depression, an irritability, entirely new to her. He who had always the happiest power of forgetting to-morrow all the rubs of to-day, seemed now quite incapable of saving himself and his cheerfulness in the old ways, nay, had developed a capacity for sheer worry she had never seen in him before. And meanwhile all the old gossips of the place spoke their mind freely to Catherine on the subject of the rector's looks, coupling their remarks with a variety of prescriptions, out of which Robert did sometimes manage to get one of his old laughs. His sleeplessness, too, which had always been a constitutional tendency, had become now so constant and wearing that Catherine began to feel a nervous hatred of his book-work, and of those long mornings at the Hall; a passionate wish to put an end to it, and carry him away for a holiday.

But he would not hear of the holiday, and he could hardly bear any talk of himself. And Catherine had been brought up in a school of feeling which bade love be very scrupulous, very delicate, and which recognised in the strongest way the right of every human soul to its own privacy, its own reserves. That something definite troubled him she was certain. What it was he clearly

avoided telling her, and she could not hurt him by impatience.

He would tell her soon—when it was right—she cried pitifully to herself. Meantime both suffered, she not knowing why, clinging to each other the while more passionately than ever.

One night, however, coming down in her dressing-gown into the study in search of a *Christian Year* she had left behind her, she found Robert with papers strewn before him, his arms on the table and his head laid down upon them. He looked up as she came in, and the expression of his eyes drew her to him irresistibly.

“Were you asleep, Robert? Do come to bed!”

He sat up, and with a pathetic gesture held out his arms to her. She came on to his knee, putting her white arms round his neck, while he leant his head against her breast.

“Are you tired with all your walking to-day?” she said presently, a pang at her heart.

“I am tired,” he said, “but not with walking.”

“Does your book worry you? You shouldn’t work so hard, Robert—you shouldn’t!”

He started.

“Don’t talk of it. Don’t let us talk or think at all, only feel!”

And he tightened his arms round her, happy once more for a moment in this environment of a perfect love. There was silence for a few moments, Catherine feeling more and more disturbed and anxious.

“Think of your mountains,” he said presently, his eyes still pressed against her, “of High Fell, and the moonlight, and the house where Mary Backhouse died. Oh! Catherine, I see you still, and shall always see

you, as I saw you then, my angel of healing and of grace!"

"I too have been thinking of her to-night," said Catherine softly, "and of the walk to Shanmoor. This evening in the garden it seemed to me as though there were Westmoreland scents in the air! I was haunted by a vision of bracken, and rocks, and sheep browsing up the fell slopes."

"Oh for a breath of the wind on High Fell!" cried Robert,—it was so new to her, the dear voice with this accent in it of yearning depression! "I want more of the spirit of the mountains, their serenity, their strength. Say me that Duddon sonnet you used to say to me there, as you said it to me that last Sunday before our wedding, when we walked up the Shanmoor road to say good-bye to that blessed spot. Oh! how I sit and think of it sometimes, when life seems to be going crookedly, that rock on the fell-side where I found you, and caught you, and snared you, my dove, for ever."

And Catherine, whose mere voice was as balm to this man of many impulses, repeated to him, softly in the midnight silence, those noble lines in which Wordsworth has expressed, with the reserve and yet the strength of the great poet, the loftiest yearning of the purest hearts—

"Enough, if something from our hand have power
To live and move, and serve the future hour,
And if, as towards the silent tomb we go,
Through love, through hope, and faith's transcendent dower,
We feel that we are greater than we know."

"He has divined it all," said Robert, drawing a long breath when she stopped, which seemed to relax the fibres of the inner man, "the fever and the fret of human thought,

the sense of littleness, of impotence, of evanescence—and he has soothed it all!”

“Oh, not all, not all!” cried Catherine, her look kindling, and her rare passion breaking through; “how little in comparison!”

For her thoughts were with him of whom it was said, “*He needed not that any one should bear witness concerning man, for he knew what was in man.*” But Robert’s only response was silence and a kind of quivering sigh.

“Robert!” she cried, pressing her cheek against his temple, “tell me, my dear, dear husband, what it is troubles you. Something does—I am certain—certain!”

“Catherine—wife—beloved!” he said to her, after another pause, in a tone of strange tension she never forgot; “generations of men and women have known what it is to be led spiritually into the desert, into that outer wilderness where even the Lord was ‘tempted.’ What am I that I should claim to escape it? And you cannot come through it with me, my darling—no, not even you. It is loneliness—it is solitariness itself——” and he shuddered. “But pray for me—pray that *He* may be with me, and that at the end there may be light!”

He pressed her to him convulsively, then gently released her. His solemn eyes, fixed upon her as she stood there beside him, seemed to forbid her to say a word more. She stooped; she laid her lips to his; it was a meeting of soul with soul; then she went softly out, breaking the quiet of the house by a stifled sob as she passed upstairs.

Oh! but at last she thought she understood him. She had not passed her girlhood, side by side with a man of delicate fibre, of melancholy and scrupulous temperament, and within hearing of all the natural interests of a

deeply religious mind, religious biography, religious psychology, and—within certain sharply defined limits—religious speculation, without being brought face to face with the black possibilities of “doubts” and “difficulties” as barriers in the Christian path. Has not almost every Christian of illustrious excellence been tried and humbled by them? Catherine, looking back upon her own youth, could remember certain crises of religious melancholy, during which she had often dropped off to sleep at night on a pillow wet with tears. They had passed away quickly, and for ever. But she went back to them now, straining her eyes through the darkness of her own past, recalling her father’s days of spiritual depression, and the few difficult words she had sometimes heard from him as to those bitter times of religious dryness and hopelessness, by which God chastens from time to time His most faithful and heroic souls. A half-contempt awoke in her for the unclouded serenity and confidence of her own inner life. If her own spiritual experience had gone deeper, she told herself with the strangest self-blame, she would have been able now to understand Robert better—to help him more.

She thought as she lay awake after those painful moments in the study, the tears welling up slowly in the darkness, of many things that had puzzled her in the past. She remembered the book she had seen on his table; her thoughts travelled over his months of intercourse with the squire; and the memory of Mr. Newcome’s attitude towards the man whom he conceived to be his Lord’s adversary, as contrasted with Robert’s, filled her with a shrinking pain she dared not analyse.

Still all through, her feeling towards her husband was in the main akin to that of the English civilian at home

towards English soldiers abroad, suffering and dying that England may be great. *She* had sheltered herself all her life from those deadly forces of unbelief which exist in English society, by a steady refusal to know what, however, any educated university man must perforce know. But such a course of action was impossible for Robert. He had been forced into the open, into the full tide of the Lord's battle. The chances of that battle are many; and the more courage the more risk of wounds and pain. But the great Captain knows—the great Captain does not forget His own!

For never, never had she the smallest doubt as to the issue of this sudden crisis in her husband's consciousness, even when she came nearest to apprehending its nature. As well might she doubt the return of daylight, as dream of any permanent eclipse descending upon the faith which had shone through every detail of Robert's ardent impulsive life, with all its struggles, all its failings, all its beauty, since she had known him first. The dread did not even occur to her. In her agony of pity and reverence she thought of him as passing through a trial, which is specially the believer's trial—the chastening by which God proves the soul He loves. Let her only love and trust in patience.

So that day by day as Robert's depression still continued, Catherine surrounded him with the tenderest and wisest affection. Her quiet common sense made itself heard, forbidding her to make too much of the change in him, which might after all, she thought, be partly explained by the mere physical results of his long strain of body and mind during the Mile End epidemic. And for the rest she would not argue; she would not inquire. She only prayed that she might so lead the Christian life

beside him, that the Lord's tenderness, the Lord's consolation, might shine upon him through her. It had never been her wont to speak to him much about his own influence, his own effect, in the parish. To the austere Christian considerations of this kind are forbidden: "It is not I, but Christ that worketh in me." But now, whenever she came across any striking trace of his power over the weak or the impure, the sick or the sad, she would in some way make it known to him, offering it to him in her delicate tenderness, as though it were a gift that the Father had laid in her hand for him—a token that the Master was still indeed with His servant, and that all was fundamentally well!

And so much, perhaps, the contact with his wife's faith, the power of her love, wrought in Robert, that during these weeks and months he also never lost his own certainty of emergence from the shadow which had overtaken him. And, indeed, driven on from day to day as he was by an imperious intellectual thirst which would be satisfied, the religion of the heart, the imaginative emotional habit of years, that incessant drama which the soul enacts with the Divine Powers to which it feels itself committed, lived and persisted through it all. Feeling was untouched. The heart was still passionately on the side of all its old loves and adorations, still blindly trustful that in the end, by some compromise as yet unseen, they would be restored to it intact.

Some time towards the end of July Robert was coming home from the Hall before lunch, tired and worn, as the morning always left him, and meditating some fresh sheets of the squire's proofs which had been in his hands that morning. On the road crossing that to the rectory he suddenly saw Reginald Newcome, thinner and whiter

than ever, striding along as fast as cassock and cloak would let him, his eyes on the ground, and his wide-awake drawn over them. He and Elsmere had scarcely met for months, and Robert had lately made up his mind that Newcome was distinctly less friendly, and wished to show it.

Elsmere had touched his arm before Newcome had perceived any one near him. Then he drew back with a start.

"Elsmere, you here! I had an idea you were away for a holiday!"

"Oh dear, no!" said Robert, smiling. "I may get away in September, perhaps—not till then."

"Mr. Wendover at home?" said the other, his eyes turning to the Hall, of which the chimneys were just visible from where they stood.

"No, he is abroad."

"You and he have made friends, I understand," said the other abruptly, his eagle look returning to Elsmere; "I hear of you as always together."

"We have made friends, and we walk a great deal when the squire is here," said Robert, meeting Newcome's harshness of tone with a bright dignity. "Mr. Wendover has even been doing something for us in the village. You should come and see the new Institute. The roof is on, and we shall open it in August or September. The best building of the kind in the country by far, and Mr. Wendover's gift."

"I suppose you use the library a great deal?" said Newcome, paying no attention to these remarks, and still eyeing his companion closely.

"A great deal."

Robert had at that moment under his arm a German

treatise on the history of the Logos doctrine, which afterwards, looking back on the little scene, he thought it probable Newcome recognised. They turned towards the rectory together, Newcome still asking abrupt questions as to the squire, the length of time he was to be away, Elsmere's work, parochial and literary, during the past six months, the numbers of his Sunday congregation, of his communicants, etc. Elsmere bore his catechism with perfect temper, though Newcome's manner had in it a strange and almost judicial imperativeness.

"Elsmere," said his questioner presently, after a pause, "I am going to have a retreat for priests at the Clergy House next month. Father H——," mentioning a famous High Churchman, "will conduct it. You would do me a special favour"—and suddenly the face softened, and shone with all its old magnetism on Elsmere—"if you would come. I believe you would find nothing to dislike in it, or in our rule, which is a most simple one."

Robert smiled, and laid his hand on the other's arm.

"No, Newcome, no; I am in no mood for H——."

The High Churchman looked at him with a quick and painful anxiety visible in the stern eyes.

"Will you tell me what that means?"

"It means," said Robert, clasping his hands tightly behind him, his pace slackening a little to meet that of Newcome—"it means that if you will give me your prayers, Newcome, your companionship sometimes, your pity always, I will thank you from the bottom of my heart. But I am in a state just now when I must fight my battles for myself, and in God's sight only!"

It was the first burst of confidence which had passed his lips to any one but Catherine.

Newcome stood still, a tremor of strong emotion running through the emaciated face.

"You are in trouble, Elsmere; I felt it, I knew it, when I first saw you!"

"Yes, I am in trouble," said Robert quietly.

"Opinions?"

"Opinions, I suppose—or facts," said Robert, his arms dropping wearily beside him. "Have you ever known what it is to be troubled in mind, I wonder, Newcome?"

And he looked at his companion with a sudden pitiful curiosity.

A kind of flash passed over Mr. Newcome's face.

"*Have I ever known?*" he repeated vaguely, and then he drew his thin hand, the hand of the ascetic and the mystic, hastily across his eyes, and was silent—his lips moving, his gaze on the ground, his whole aspect that of a man wrought out of himself by a sudden passion of memory.

Robert watched him with surprise, and was just speaking, when Mr. Newcome looked up, every drawn attenuated feature working painfully.

"Did you never ask yourself, Elsmere," he said slowly, "what it was drove me from the bar and journalism to the East End? Do you think I don't know," and his voice rose, his eyes flamed, "what black devil it is that is gnawing at your heart now? Why, man, I have been through darker gulfs of hell than you have ever sounded! Many a night I have felt myself *mad—mad of doubt*—a castaway on a shoreless sea; doubting not only God or Christ, but myself, the soul, the very existence of good. I found only one way out of it, and *you* will find only one way."

The lithe hand caught Robert's arm impetuously—the voice with its accent of fierce conviction was at his ear.

“Trample on yourself! Pray down the demon, fast, scourge, kill the body, that the soul may live! What are we, miserable worms, that we should defy the Most High, that we should set our wretched faculties against His Omnipotence? Submit—submit—humble yourself, my brother! Fling away the freedom which is your ruin. There is no freedom for man. Either a slave to Christ, or a slave to his own lusts—there is no other choice. Go away; exchange your work here for a time for work in London. You have too much leisure here: Satan has too much opportunity. I foresaw it—I foresaw it when you and I first met. I felt I had a message for you, and here I deliver it. In the Lord's name, I bid you fly; I bid you yield in time. Better to be the Lord's captive than *the Lord's betrayer!*”

The wasted form was drawn up to its full height, the arm was outstretched, the long cloak fell back from it in long folds—voice and eye were majesty itself. Robert had a tremor of responsive passion. How easy it sounded, how tempting, to cut the knot, to mutilate and starve the rebellious intellect which would assert itself against the soul's purest instincts! Newcome had done it—why not he?

And then, suddenly, as he stood gazing at his companion, the spring sun, and murmur all about them, another face, another life, another message, flashed on his inmost sense—the face and life of Henry Grey. Words torn from their context, but full for him of intensest meaning, passed rapidly through his mind: “*God is not wisely trusted when declared unintelligible.*” “*Such honour rooted in dishonour stands; such faith unfaithful makes us*

falsely true." "God is for ever reason: and His communication, His revelation, is reason."

He turned away with a slight sad shake of the head. The spell was broken. Mr. Newcome's arm dropped, and he moved sombrely on beside Robert—the hand, which held a little book of Hours against his cloak, trembling slightly.

At the rectory gate he stopped.

"Good-bye—I must go home."

"You won't come in?—No, no, Newcome; believe me, I am no rash careless egotist, risking wantonly the most precious things in life! But the call is on me, and I must follow it. All life is God's, and all thought—not only a fraction of it. He cannot let me wander very far!"

But the cold fingers he held so warmly dropped from his, and Newcome turned away.

A week afterwards, or thereabouts, Robert had in some sense followed Newcome's counsel. Admonished perhaps by sheer physical weakness, as much as by anything else, he had for the moment laid down his arms; he had yielded to an invading feebleness of the will, which refused, as it were, to carry on the struggle any longer, at such a life-destroying pitch of intensity. The intellectual oppression of itself brought about wild reaction and recoil, and a passionate appeal to that inward witness of the soul which holds its own long after the reason has practically ceased to struggle.

It came about in this way. One morning he stood reading in the window of the library the last of the squire's letters. It contained a short but masterly analysis of the mental habits and idiosyncrasies of St. Paul, *à propos* of St. Paul's witness to the Resurrection. Every

now and then, as Elsmere turned the pages, the orthodox protest would assert itself, the orthodox arguments make themselves felt as though in mechanical involuntary protest. But their force and vitality was gone. Between the Paul of Anglican theology and the fiery fallible man of genius—so weak logically, so strong in poetry, in rhetoric, in moral passion, whose portrait has been drawn for us by a free and temperate criticism—the rector knew, in a sort of dull way, that his choice was made. The one picture carried reason and imagination with it; the other contented neither.

But as he put down the letter something seemed to snap within him. Some chord of physical endurance gave way. For five months he had been living intellectually at a speed no man maintains with impunity, and this letter of the squire's, with its imperious demands upon the tired irritable brain, was the last straw.

He sank down on the oriel seat, the letter dropping from his hands. Outside, the little garden, now a mass of red and pink roses, the hill and the distant stretches of park were wrapped in a thick sultry mist, through which a dim far-off sunlight struggled on to the library floor, and lay in ghostly patches on the polished boards and lower ranges of books.

The simplest religious thoughts began to flow over him—the simplest childish words of prayer were on his lips. He felt himself delivered, he knew not how or why.

He rose deliberately, laid the squire's letter among his other papers, and tied them up carefully; then he took up the books which lay piled on the squire's writing-table: all those volumes of German, French, and English criticism, liberal or apologetic, which he had been ac-

cumulating round him day by day with a feverish toilsome impartiality, and began rapidly and methodically to put them back in their places on the shelves.

"I have done too much thinking, too much reading," he was saying to himself as he went through his task. "Now let it be the turn of something else!"

And still as he handled the books, it was as though Catherine's figure glided backwards and forwards beside him, across the smooth floor, as though her hand were on his arm, her eyes shining into his. Ah—he knew well what it was had made the sharpest sting of this wrestle through which he had been passing! It was not merely religious dread, religious shame; that terror of disloyalty to the Divine Images which have filled the soul's inmost shrine since its first entry into consciousness, such as every good man feels in a like strait. This had been strong indeed; but men are men, and love is love! Ay, it was to the dark certainty of Catherine's misery that every advance in knowledge and intellectual power had brought him nearer. It was from that certainty that he now, and for the last time, recoiled. It was too much. It could not be borne.

He walked home, counting up the engagements of the next few weeks—the school-treat, two club field-days, a sermon in the county town, the probable opening of the new Workmen's Institute, and so on. Oh! to be through them all and away, away amid Alpine scents and silences. He stood a moment beside the gray slowly-moving river, half hidden beneath the rank flower-growth, the tansy and willow-herb, the luxuriant elder and trailing brambles of its August banks, and thought with hungry passion of the clean-swept Alpine pasture,

the fir-woods, and the tameless mountain streams. In three weeks or less he and Catherine should be climbing the Jaman or the Dent du Midi. And till then he would want all his time for men and women. Books should hold him no more.

Catherine only put her arms round his neck in silence when he told her. The relief was too great for words. He, too, held her close, saying nothing. But that night, for the first time for weeks, Elsmere's wife slept in peace and woke without dread of the day before her.

BOOK IV.

CRISIS.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE next fortnight was a time of truce. Elsmere neither read nor reasoned. He spent his days in the school, in the village, pottering about the Mile End cottages, or the new Institute—sometimes fishing, sometimes passing long summer hours on the commons with his club boys, hunting the ponds for caddises, newts, and water-beetles, peering into the furze-bushes for second broods, or watching the sand-martins in the gravel-pits, and trudging home at night in the midst of an escort of enthusiasts, all of them with pockets as full and miry as his own, to deposit the treasures of the day in the club-room. Once more the rector, though physically perhaps less ardent than of yore, was the life of the party, and a certain awe and strangeness which had developed in his boys' minds towards him, during the last few weeks, passed away.

It was curious that in these days he would neither sit nor walk alone if he could help it. Catherine or a stray parishioner was almost always with him. All the while, vaguely, in the depths of consciousness, there was the knowledge that behind this piece of quiet water on which his life was now sailing, there lay storm and darkness, and that in front loomed fresh possibilities of

tempest. He knew, in a way, that it was a treacherous peace which had overtaken him. And yet it was peace. The pressure exerted by the will had temporarily given way, and the deepest forces of the man's being had reasserted themselves. He could feel and love and pray again; and Catherine, seeing the old glow in the eyes, the old spring in the step, made the whole of life one thank-offering.

On the evening following that moment of reaction in the Murewell library, Robert had written to the squire. His letter had been practically a withdrawal from the correspondence.

"I find," he wrote, "that I have been spending too much time and energy lately on these critical matters. It seems to me that my work as a clergyman has suffered. Nor can I deny that your book and your letters have been to me a source of great trouble of mind.

"My heart is where it was, but my head is often confused. Let controversy rest a while. My wife says I want a holiday; I think so myself, and we are off in three weeks; not, however, I hope, before we have welcomed you home again, and got you to open the new Institute, which is already dazzling the eyes of the village by its size and splendour, and the white paint that Harris the builder has been lavishing upon it."

Ten days later, rather earlier than was expected, the squire and Mrs. Darcy were at home again. Robert reentered the great house the morning after their arrival with a strange reluctance. Its glow and magnificence, the warm perfumed air of the hall, brought back a sense of old oppressions, and he walked down the passage to the library with a sinking heart. There he found the squire busy as usual with one of those fresh cargoes of

books which always accompanied him on any homeward journey. He was more brown, more wrinkled, more shrunken; more full of force, of harsh epigram, of grim anecdote than ever. Robert sat on the edge of the table laughing over his stories of French Orientalists, or Roman cardinals, or modern Greek professors, enjoying the impartial sarcasm which one of the greatest of *savants* was always ready to pour out upon his brethren of the craft.

The squire, however, was never genial for a moment during the interview. He did not mention his book nor Elsmere's letter. But Elsmere suspected in him a good deal of suppressed irritability; and, as after a while he abruptly ceased to talk, the visit grew difficult.

The rector walked home feeling restless and depressed. The mind had begun to work again. It was only by a great effort that he could turn his thoughts from the squire, and all that the squire had meant to him during the past year, and so woo back to himself "the shy bird Peace."

Mr. Wendover watched the door close behind him, and then went back to his work with a gesture of impatience.

"Once a priest, always a priest. What a fool I was to forget it! You think you make an impression on the mystic, and at the bottom there is always something which defies you and common sense. 'Two and two do not, and shall not, make four,'" he said to himself, in a mincing voice of angry sarcasm. "'It would give me too much pain that they should.' Well, and I suppose what might have been a rational friendship will go by the board like everything else. What can make the man shilly-shally in this way? He is convinced already, as he knows—those later letters were conclusive! His living,

perhaps, and his work! Not for the money's sake—there never was a more incredibly disinterested person born. But his work? Well, who is to hinder his work? Will he be the first parson in the Church of England who looks after the poor and holds his tongue? If you can't speak your mind, it is something at any rate to possess one—nine-tenths of the clergy being without the appendage. But Elsmere—pshaw! he will go muddling on to the end of the chapter!”

The squire, indeed, was like a hunter whose prey escapes him at the very moment of capture, and there grew on him a mocking aggressive mood which Elsmere often found hard to bear.

One natural symptom of it was his renewed churlishness as to all local matters. Elsmere one afternoon spent an hour in trying to persuade him to open the new Institute.

“What on earth do you want me for?” inquired Mr. Wendover, standing before the fire in the library, the Medusa head peering over his shoulder. “You know perfectly well that all the gentry about here—I suppose you will have some of them—regard me as an old reprobate, and the poor people, I imagine, as a kind of ogre. To me it doesn't matter a twopenny damn—I apologise; it was the Duke of Wellington's favourite standard of value—but I can't see what good it can do either you or the village, under the circumstances, that I should stand on my head for the popular edification.”

Elsmere, however, merely stood his ground, arguing and bantering, till the squire grudgingly gave way. This time, after he departed, Mr. Wendover, instead of going to his work, still stood gloomily ruminating in front of the fire. His frowning eyes wandered round the great

room before him. For the first time he was conscious that now, as soon as the charm of Elsmere's presence was withdrawn, his working hours were doubly solitary; that his loneliness weighed upon him more; and that it mattered to him appreciably whether that young man went or stayed. The stirring of a new sensation, however,—unparalleled since the brief days when even Roger Wendover had his friends and his attractions like other men,—was soon lost in renewed chafing at Elsmere's absurdities. The squire had been at first perfectly content—so he told himself—to limit the field of their intercourse, and would have been content to go on doing so. But Elsmere himself had invited freedom of speech between them.

"I would have given him my best," Mr. Wendover reflected impatiently. "I could have handed on to him all I shall never use, and he might use, admirably. And now we might as well be on the terms we were to begin with for all the good I get out of him, or he out of me. Clearly nothing but cowardice! He cannot face the intellectual change, and he must, I suppose, dread lest it should affect his work. Good God, what nonsense! As if any one inquired what an English parson believed nowadays, so long as he performs all the usual antics decently!"

And, meanwhile, it never occurred to the squire that Elsmere had a wife, and a pious one. Catherine had been dropped out of his calculation as to Elsmere's future, at a very early stage.

The following afternoon Robert, coming home from a round, found Catherine out, and a note awaiting him from the Hall.

"Can you and Mrs. Elsmere come in to tea?" wrote the squire. "Madame de Netteville is here, and one or two others."

Robert grumbled a good deal, looked for Catherine to devise an excuse for him, could not find her, and at last reluctantly set out again alone.

He was tired and his mood was heavy. As he trudged through the park he never once noticed the soft sun-flooded distance, the shining loops of the river, the feeding deer, or any of those natural witcheries to which eye and sense were generally so responsive. The labourers going home, the children—with aprons full of crab-apples, and lips dyed by the first blackberries—who passed him, got but an absent smile or salute from the rector. The interval of exaltation and recoil was over. The ship of the mind was once more labouring in alien and dreary seas.

He roused himself to remember that he had been curious to see Madame de Netteville. She was an old friend of the squire's, the holder of a London salon, much more exquisite and select than anything Lady Charlotte could show.

"She had the same thing in Paris before the war," the squire explained. "Renan gave me a card to her. An extraordinary woman. No particular originality; but one of the best persons 'to consult about ideas,' like Joubert's Madame de Beaumont, I ever saw. Receptiveness itself. A beauty, too, or was one, and a bit of a sphinx, which adds to the attraction. Mystery becomes a woman vastly. One suspects her of adventures just enough to find her society doubly piquant."

Vincent directed him to the upper terrace, whither tea had been taken. This terrace, which was one of the

features of Murewell, occupied the top of the yew-clothed hill on which the library looked out. Evelyn himself had planned it. Along its upper side ran one of the most beautiful of old walls, broken by niches and statues, tapestried with roses and honeysuckle, and opening in the centre to reveal Evelyn's darling conceit of all—a semicircular space, holding a fountain, and leading to a grotto. The grotto had been scooped out of the hill; it was peopled with dim figures of fauns and nymphs who showed white amid its moist greenery; and in front a marble Silence drooped over the fountain, which held gold and silver fish in a singularly clear water. Outside ran the long stretch of level turf, edged with a jewelled rim of flowers; and as the hill fell steeply underneath, the terrace was like a high green platform raised into air, in order that a Wendover might see his domain, which from thence lay for miles spread out before him.

Here, beside the fountain, were gathered the squire, Mrs. Darcy, Madame de Netteville, and two unknown men. One of them was introduced to Elsmere as Mr. Spooner, and recognised by him as a Fellow of the Royal Society, a famous mathematician, sceptic, *bon vivant*, and sayer of good things. The other was a young Liberal Catholic, the author of a remarkable collection of essays on mediæval subjects in which the squire, treating the man's opinions of course as of no account, had instantly recognised the note of the true scholar. A pale, small, hectic creature, possessed of that restless energy of mind which often goes with the heightened temperature of consumption.

Robert took a seat by Madame de Netteville, whose appearance was picturesqueness itself. Her dress, a skilful mixture of black and creamy yellow, lay about her in

folds, as soft, as carelessly effective as her manner. Her plumed hat shadowed a face which was no longer young in such a way as to hide all the lines possible; while the half-light brought admirably out the rich dark smoothness of the tints, the black lustre of the eyes. A delicate blue-veined hand lay upon her knee, and Robert was conscious after ten minutes or so that all her movements, which seemed at first merely slow and languid, were in reality singularly full of decision and purpose.

She was not easy to talk to on a first acquaintance. Robert felt that she was studying him, and was not so much at his ease as usual, partly owing to fatigue and mental worry.

She asked him little abrupt questions about the neighbourhood, his parish, his work, in a soft tone which had, however, a distinct aloofness, even *hauteur*. His answers, on the other hand, were often a trifle reckless and off-hand. He was in a mood to be impatient with a *mondaine's* languid inquiries into clerical work, and it seemed to him the squire's description had been overdone.

"So you try to civilise your peasants," she said at last. "Does it succeed—is it worth while?"

"That depends upon your general ideas of what is worth while," he answered smiling.

"Oh, everything is worth while that passes the time," she said hurriedly. "The clergy of the old *régime* went through life half asleep. That was their way of passing it. Your way, being a modern, is to bustle and try experiments."

Her eyes, half closed but none the less provocative, ran over Elsmere's keen face and pliant frame. An atmosphere of intellectual and social assumption enwrapped her, which annoyed Robert in much the same

way as Langham's philosophical airs were wont to do. He was drawn without knowing it into a match of wits wherein his strokes, if they lacked the finish and subtlety of hers, showed certainly no lack of sharpness or mental resource. Madame de Netteville's tone insensibly changed, her manner quickened, her great eyes gradually unclosed.

Suddenly, as they were in the middle of a skirmish as to the reality of influence, Madame de Netteville paradoxically maintaining that no human being had ever really converted, transformed, or convinced another, the voice of young Wishart, shrill and tremulous, rose above the general level of talk.

"I am quite ready; I am not the least afraid of a definition. Theology is organised knowledge in the field of religion, a science like any other science."

"Certainly, my dear sir, certainly," said Mr. Spooner, leaning forward with his hands round his knees, and speaking with the most elegant and good-humoured *sang-froid* imaginable, "the science of the world's ghosts! I cannot imagine any more fascinating."

"Well," said Madame de Netteville to Robert, with a deep breath, "*that* was a remark to have hurled at you all at once out of doors on a summer's afternoon! Oh, Mr. Spooner!" she said, raising her voice, "don't play the heretic here! There is no fun in it; there are too many with you."

"I did not begin it, my dear madam, and your reproach is unjust. On one side of me Archbishop Manning's *fidus Achates*," and the speaker took off his large straw hat and gracefully waved it—first to the right, then to the left. "On the other, the rector of the parish. 'Cannon to right of me, cannon to left of me.' I submit my courage is unimpeachable!"

He spoke with a smiling courtesy as excessive as his silky moustache, his long straw-coloured beard, and his Panama hat. Madame de Netteville surveyed him with cool critical eyes. Robert smiled slightly, acknowledged the bow, but did not speak.

Mr. Wishart evidently took no heed of anything but his own thoughts. He sat bolt upright with shining excited eyes.

"Ah, I remember that article of yours in the *Fortnightly*! How you sceptics miss the point!"

And out came a stream of argument and denunciation which had probably lain lava-hot at the heart of the young convert for years, waiting for such a moment as this, when he had before him at close quarters two of the most famous antagonists of his faith. The outburst was striking, but certainly unpardonably ill-timed. Madame de Netteville retreated into herself with a shrug. Robert, in whom a sore nerve had been set jarring, did his utmost to begin his talk with her again.

In vain!—for the squire struck in. He had been sitting huddled together—his cynical eyes wandering from Wishart to Elsmere—when suddenly some extravagant remark of the young Catholic, and Robert's effort to edge away from the conversation, caught his attention at the same moment. His face hardened, and in his nasal voice he dealt a swift epigram at Mr. Wishart, which for the moment left the young disputant floundering.

But only for the moment. In another minute or two the argument, begun so casually, had developed into a serious trial of strength, in which the squire and young Wishart took the chief parts, while Mr. Spooner threw in a laugh and a sarcasm here and there.

And as long as Mr. Wendover talked, Madame de

Netteville listened. Robert's restless repulsion to the whole incident, his passionate wish to escape from these phrases and illustrations and turns of argument which were all so wearisomely stale and familiar to him, found no support in her. Mrs. Darcy dared not second his attempts at chat, for Mr. Wendover, on the rare occasions when he held forth, was accustomed to be listened to; and Elsmere was of too sensitive a social fibre to break up the party by an abrupt exit, which could only have been interpreted in one way.

So he stayed, and perforce listened, but in complete silence. None of Mr. Wendover's side-hits touched him. Only as the talk went on, the rector in the background got paler and paler; his eyes, as they passed from the mobile face of the Catholic convert, already, for those who knew, marked with the signs of death, to the bronzed visage of the squire, grew duller--more instinct with a slowly-dawning despair.

Half an hour later he was once more on the road leading to the park gate. He had a vague memory that at parting the squire had shown him the cordiality of one suddenly anxious to apologise by manner, if not by word. Otherwise everything was forgotten. He was only anxious, half dazed as he was, to make out wherein lay the vital difference between his present self and the Elsmere who had passed along that road an hour before.

He had heard a conversation on religious topics, wherein nothing was new to him, nothing affected him intellectually at all. What was there in that to break the spring of life like this? He stood still, heavily trying to understand himself.

Then gradually it became clear to him. A month

ago, every word of that hectic young pleader for Christ and the Christian certainties would have roused in him a leaping passionate sympathy—the heart's yearning assent, even when the intellect was most perplexed. Now that inmost strand had given way. Suddenly the disintegrating force he had been so pitifully, so blindly, holding at bay had penetrated once for all into the sanctuary! What had happened to him had been the first real failure of *feeling*, the first treachery of the *heart*. Wishart's hopes and hatreds, and sublime defiances of man's petty faculties, had aroused in him no echo, no response. His soul had been dead within him.

As he gained the shelter of the wooded lane beyond the gate it seemed to Robert that he was going through, once more, that old fierce temptation of Bunyan's,—

“For after the Lord had in this manner thus graciously delivered me, and had set me down so sweetly in the faith of His Holy Gospel, and had given me such strong consolation and blessed evidence from heaven, touching my interest in His love through Christ, the tempter came upon me again, and that with a more grievous and dreadful temptation than before. And that was, ‘To sell and part with this most blessed Christ; to exchange Him for the things of life, for anything!’ The temptation lay upon me for the space of a year, and did follow me so continually that I was not rid of it one day in a month: no, not sometimes one hour in many days together, for it did always, in almost whatever I thought, intermix itself therewith, in such sort that I could neither eat my food, stoop for a pin, chop a stick, or cast mine eyes to look on this or that, but still the temptation would come: ‘Sell Christ for this, or sell Christ for that, sell Him, sell Him!’”

Was this what lay before the minister of God now in this *selva oscura* of life? The selling of the Master, of "the love so sweet, the unction spiritual," for an intellectual satisfaction, the ravaging of all the fair places of the heart by an intellectual need!

And still through all the despair, all the revolt, all the pain, which made the summer air a darkness, and closed every sense in him to the evening beauty, he felt the irresistible march and pressure of the new instincts, the new forces, which life and thought had been calling into being. The words of St. Augustine which he had read to Catherine, taken in a strange new sense, came back to him—"Commend to the keeping of the Truth whatever the Truth hath given thee, and thou shalt lose nothing!"

Was it the summons of Truth which was rending the whole nature in this way?

Robert stood still, and with his hands locked behind him, and his face turned like the face of a blind man towards a world of which it saw nothing, went through a desperate catechism of himself.

"*Do I believe in God?* Surely, surely! 'Though He slay me yet will I trust in Him!' *Do I believe in Christ?* Yes,—in the teacher, the martyr, the symbol to us Westerns of all things heavenly and abiding, the image and pledge of the invisible life of the spirit,—with all my soul and all my mind!

"*But in the Man-God, the Word from Eternity,—in a wonder-working Christ, in a risen and ascended Jesus, in the living Intercessor and Mediator for the lives of His doomed brethren?*"

He waited, conscious that it was the crisis of his history, and there rose in him, as though articulated one by one by an audible voice, words of irrevocable meaning.

"Every human soul in which the voice of God makes itself felt, enjoys, equally with Jesus of Nazareth, the divine sonship, and '*miracles do not happen!*'"

It was done. He felt for the moment as Bunyan did after his lesser defeat.

"Now was the battle won, and down fell I as a bird that is shot from the top of a tree into great guilt and fearful despair. Thus getting out of my bed I went moping in the field; but God knows with as heavy an heart as mortal man I think could bear, where for the space of two hours I was like a man bereft of life."

All these years of happy spiritual certainty, of rejoicing oneness with Christ, to end in this wreck and loss! Was not this indeed "*il gran rifiuto*"—the greatest of which human daring is capable? The lane darkened round him. Not a soul was in sight. The only sounds were the sounds of a gently-breathing nature, sounds of birds and swaying branches and intermittent gusts of air rustling through the gorse and the drifts of last year's leaves in the wood beside him. He moved mechanically onward, and presently, after the first flutter of desolate terror had passed away, with a new inrushing sense which seemed to him a sense of liberty—of infinite expansion.

Suddenly the trees before him thinned, the ground sloped away, and there to the left on the westernmost edge of the hill lay the square stone rectory, its windows open to the evening coolness, a white flutter of pigeons round the dovecote on the side lawn, the gold of the August wheat in the great cornfield showing against the heavy girdle of oak-wood.

Robert stood gazing at it—the home consecrated by love, by effort, by faith. The high alternations of intellectual and spiritual debate, the strange emerging sense

of deliverance, gave way to a most bitter human pang of misery.

"O God! My wife—my work!"

... There was a sound of a voice calling—Catherine's voice calling for him. He leant against the gate of the wood-path, struggling sternly with himself. This was no simple matter of his own intellectual consistency or happiness. Another's whole life was concerned. Any precipitate speech, or hasty action, would be a crime. A man is bound above all things to protect those who depend on him from his own immature or revocable impulses. Not a word yet, till this sense of convulsion and upheaval had passed away, and the mind was once more its own master.

He opened the gate and went towards her. She was strolling along the path looking out for him, one delicate hand gathering up her long evening dress—that very same black brocade she had worn in the old days at Burwood—the other playing with their Dandie Dinmont puppy who was leaping beside her. As she caught sight of him, there was the flashing smile, the hurrying step. And he felt he could but just drag himself to meet her.

"Robert, how long you have been! I thought you must have stayed to dinner after all! And how tired you seem!"

"I had a long walk," he said, catching her hand, as it slipped itself under his arm, and clinging to it as though to a support. "And I am tired. There is no use whatever in denying it."

His voice was light, but if it had not been so dark she must have been startled by his face. As they went on towards the house, however, she scolding him for over-walking, he won his battle with himself. He went

through the evening so that even Catherine's jealous eyes saw nothing but extra fatigue. In the most desperate straits of life love is still the fountain of all endurance, and if ever a man loved it was Robert Elsmere.

But that night, as he lay sleepless in their quiet room, with the window open to the stars and to the rising gusts of wind, which blew the petals of the cluster-rose outside in drifts of "fair weather snow" on to the window-sill, he went through an agony which no words can adequately describe.

He must, of course, give up his living and his orders. His standards and judgments had always been simple and plain in these respects. In other men it might be right and possible that they should live on in the ministry of the Church, doing the humane and charitable work of the Church, while refusing assent to the intellectual and dogmatic framework on which the Church system rests; but for himself it would be neither right nor wrong, but simply impossible. He did not argue or reason about it. There was a favourite axiom of Mr. Grey's which had become part of his pupil's spiritual endowment, and which was perpetually present to him at this crisis of his life, in the spirit, if not in the letter—"Conviction is the Conscience of the Mind." And with this intellectual conscience he was no more capable of trifling than with the moral conscience.

The night passed away. How the rare intermittent sounds impressed themselves upon him!—the stir of the child's waking soon after midnight in the room overhead; the cry of the owls on the oak-wood; the purring of the night-jars on the common; the morning chatter of the swallows round the eaves.

With the first invasion of the dawn Robert raised

himself and looked at Catherine. She was sleeping with that light sound sleep which belongs to health of body and mind, one hand under her face, the other stretched out in soft relaxation beside her. Her husband hung over her in a bewilderment of feeling. Before him passed all sorts of incoherent pictures of the future; the mind was caught by all manner of incongruous details in that saddest uprooting which lay before him. How her sleep, her ignorance, reproached him! He thought of the wreck of all her pure ambitions—for him, for their common work, for the people she had come to love; the ruin of her life of charity and tender usefulness, the darkening of all her hopes, the shaking of all her trust. Two years of devotion, of exquisite self-surrender, had brought her to this! It was for this he had lured her from the shelter of her hills, for this she had opened to him all her sweet stores of faith, all the deepest springs of her womanhood. Oh, how she must suffer! The thought of it and his own helplessness wrung his heart.

Oh, could he keep her love through it all? There was an unspeakable dread mingled with his grief—his remorse. It had been there for months. In her eyes would not only pain but *sin* divide them? Could he possibly prevent her whole relation to him from altering and dwindling?

It was to be the problem of his remaining life. With a great cry of the soul to that God it yearned and felt for through all the darkness and ruin which encompassed it, he laid his hand on hers with the timidest passing touch.

“Catherine, I will make amends! My wife, I will make amends!”

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE next morning Catherine, finding that Robert still slept on after their usual waking time, and remembering his exhaustion of the night before, left him softly, and kept the house quiet that he might not be disturbed. She was in charge of the now toddling Mary in the dining-room when the door opened and Robert appeared.

At sight of him she sprang up with a half-cry; the face seemed to have lost all its fresh colour, its look of sun and air; the eyes were sunk; the lips and chin lined and drawn. It was like a face from which the youth had suddenly been struck out.

"Robert!——" but her question died on her lips.

"A bad night, darling, and a bad headache," he said, groping his way, as it seemed to her, to the table, his hand leaning on her arm. "Give me some breakfast."

She restrained herself at once, put him into an arm-chair by the window, and cared for him in her tender noiseless way. But she had grown almost as pale as he, and her heart was like lead.

"Will you send me off for the day to Thurston ponds?" he said presently, trying to smile with lips so stiff and nerveless that the will had small control over them.

"Can you walk so far? You did overdo it yesterday, you know. You have never got over Mile End, Robert."

But her voice had a note in it which in his weakness he could hardly bear. He thirsted to be alone again, to be able to think over quietly what was best for her—for them both. There must be a next step, and in her neighbourhood he was too feeble, too tortured, to decide upon it.

"No more, dear—no more," he said impatiently, as she tried to feed him; then he added as he rose: "Don't make arrangements for our going next week, Catherine; it can't be so soon."

Catherine looked at him with eyes of utter dismay. The sustaining hope of all these difficult weeks, which had slipped with such terrible unexpectedness into their happy life, was swept away from her.

"Robert, you *ought* to go."

"I have too many things to arrange," he said sharply, almost irritably. Then his tone changed: "Don't urge it, Catherine."

His eyes in their weariness seemed to entreat her not to argue. She stooped and kissed him, her lips trembling.

"When do you want to go to Thurston?"

"As soon as possible. Can you find me my fishing-basket and get me some sandwiches? I shall only lounge there and take it easy."

She did everything for him that wifely hands could do. Then when his fishing-basket was strapped on, and his lunch was slipped into the capacious pocket of the well-worn shooting coat, she threw her arms round him.

"Robert, you will come away *soon*."

He roused himself and kissed her.

"I will," he said simply, withdrawing, however, from her grasp, as though he could not bear those close pleading eyes. "Good-bye! I shall be back some time in the afternoon."

From her post beside the study window she watched him take the short cut across the cornfield. She was miserable, and all at sea. A week ago he had been so like himself again, and now——! Never had she seen him in anything like this state of physical and mental collapse.

"Oh, Robert," she cried under her breath, with an abandonment like a child's, strong soul that she was, "why *won't* you tell me, dear? Why won't you let me share? I might help you through—I might."

She supposed he must be again in trouble of mind. A weaker woman would have implored, tormented, till she knew all. Catherine's very strength and delicacy of nature, and that respect which was inbred in her for the *sacra* of the inner life, stood in her way. She could not catechise him, and force his confidence on this subject of all others. It must be given freely. And oh! it was so long in coming!

Surely, surely, it must be mainly physical, the result of overstrain—expressing itself in characteristic mental worry, just as daily life reproduces itself in dreams. The worldly man suffers at such times through wordly things, the religious man through his religion. Comforting herself a little with thoughts of this kind, and with certain more or less vague preparations for departure, Catherine got through the morning as best she might.

Meanwhile, Robert was trudging along to Thurston under a sky which, after a few threatening showers, promised once more to be a sky of intense heat. He had with him all the tackle necessary for spooning pike, a sport the novelty and success of which had hugely commended it the year before to those Esau-like instincts Murewell had so much developed in him.

And now—oh the weariness of the August warmth, and the long stretches of sandy road! By the time he reached the ponds he was tired out; but instead of stopping at the largest of the three, where a picturesque group of old brick cottages brought a reminder of man and his works into the prairie solitude of the common,

he pushed on to a smaller pool just beyond, now hidden in a green cloud of birch-wood. Here, after pushing his way through the closely-set trees, he made some futile attempts at fishing, only to put up his rod long before the morning was over and lay it beside him on the bank. And there he sat for hours, vaguely watching the reflection of the clouds, the gambols and quarrels of the waterfowl, the ways of the birds, the alternations of sun and shadow on the softly-moving trees,—the real self of him passing all the while through an interminable inward drama, starting from the past, stretching to the future, steeped in passion, in pity, in regret.

He thought of the feelings with which he had taken orders, of Oxford scenes and Oxford persons, of the efforts, the pains, the successes of his first year at Murewell. What a ghastly mistake it had all been! He felt a kind of sore contempt for himself, for his own lack of prescience, of self-knowledge. His life looked to him so shallow and worthless. How does a man ever retrieve such a false step? He groaned aloud as he thought of Catherine linked to one born to defeat her hopes, and all that natural pride that a woman feels in the strength and consistency of the man she loves. As he sat there by the water he touched the depths of self-humiliation.

As to religious belief, everything was a chaos. What might be to him the ultimate forms and condition of thought, the tired mind was quite incapable of divining. To every stage in the process of destruction it was feverishly alive. But its formative energy was for the moment gone. The foundations were swept away, and everything must be built up afresh. Only the *habit* of faith held, the close instinctive clinging to a Power beyond sense—a Goodness, a Will, not man's. The soul had been stripped

of its old defences, but at his worst there was never a moment when Elsmere felt himself *utterly* forsaken.

But his people—his work! Every now and then into the fragmentary debate still going on within him there would flash little pictures of Murewell. The green, with the sun on the house-fronts, the awning over the village shop, the vane on the old “Manor-house,” the familiar figures at the doors; his church, with every figure in the Sunday congregation as clear to him as though he were that moment in the pulpit; the children he had taught, the sick he had nursed, this or that weather-beaten or brutalised peasant whose history he knew, whose tragic secrets he had learnt,—all these memories and images clung about him as though with ghostly hands, asking, “Why will you desert us? You are ours—stay with us!”

Then his thoughts would run over the future, dwelling, with a tense realistic sharpness, on every detail which lay before him—the arrangements with his *locum tenens*, the interview with the bishop, the parting with the rectory. It even occurred to him to wonder what must be done with Martha and his mother’s cottage.

His mother? As he thought of her a wave of unutterable longing rose and broke. The difficult tears stood in his eyes. He had a strange conviction that at this crisis of his life she of *all* human beings would have understood him best.

When would the squire know? He pictured the interview with him, divining, with the same abnormal clearness of inward vision, Mr. Wendover’s start of mingled triumph and impatience—triumph in the new recruit, impatience with the Quixotic folly which could lead a man to look upon orthodox dogma as a thing real enough to be publicly renounced, or clerical pledges as more than

a form of words. So henceforth he was on the same side with the squire, held by an indiscriminating world as bound to the same negations, the same hostilities! The thought roused in him a sudden fierceness of moral repugnance. The squire and Edward Langham—they were the only sceptics of whom he had ever had close and personal experience. And with all his old affection for Langham, all his frank sense of pliancy in the squire's hands, yet in this strait of life how he shrinks from them both!—souls at war with life and man, without holiness, without perfume!

Is it the law of things? "Once loosen a man's *religio*, once fling away the old binding elements, the old traditional restraints which have made him what he is, and moral deterioration is certain." How often he has heard it said! How often he has endorsed it! Is it true? His heart grows cold within him. What good man can ever contemplate with patience the loss, not of friends or happiness, but of his best self? What shall it profit a man, indeed, if he gain the whole world—the whole world of knowledge and speculation—and *lose his own soul*?

And then, for his endless comfort, there rose on the inward eye the vision of an Oxford lecture room, of a short sturdy figure, of a great brow over honest eyes, of words alive with moral passion, of thought instinct with the beauty of holiness. Thank God for the saint in Henry Grey! Thinking of it, Robert felt his own self-respect re-born.

Oh! to see Grey in the flesh, to get his advice, his approval! Even though it was the depth of vacation, Grey was so closely connected with the town, as distinguished from the university, life of Oxford, it might

be quite possible to find him at home. Elsmere suddenly determined to find out at once if he could be seen.

And if so, he would go over to Oxford at once. *This* should be the next step, and he would say nothing to Catherine till afterwards. He felt himself so dull, so weary, so resourceless. Grey should help and counsel him, should send him back with a clearer brain—a quicker ingenuity of love, better furnished against her pain and his own.

Then everything else was forgotten; and he thought of nothing but that grisly moment of waking in the empty room, when still believing it night, he had put out his hand for his wife, and with a superstitious pang had felt himself alone. His heart torn with a hundred inarticulate cries of memory and grief, he sat on beside the water, unconscious of the passing of time, his gray eyes staring sightlessly at the wood-pigeons as they flew past him, at the occasional flash of a kingfisher, at the moving panorama of summer clouds above the trees opposite.

At last he was startled back to consciousness by the fall of a few heavy drops of warm rain. He looked at his watch. It was nearly four o'clock. He rose, stiff and cramped with sitting, and at the same instant he saw beyond the birchwood on the open stretch of common a boy's figure, which, after a step or two, he recognised as Ned Irwin.

"You here, Ned?" he said, stopping, the pastoral temper in him reasserting itself at once. "Why aren't you harvesting?"

"Please, sir, I finished with the Hall medders yesterday, and Mr. Carter's job don't begin till to-morrow. He's got a machine coming from Witley, he hev, and

they won't let him have it till Thursday, so I've been out after things for the club."

And opening the tin box strapped on his back, he showed the day's capture of butterflies, and some belated birds' eggs, the plunder of a bit of common where the turf for the winter's burning was just being cut.

"Goatsucker, linnet, stonechat," said the rector, fingering them. "Well done for August, Ned. If you haven't got anything better to do with them, give them to that small boy of Mr. Carter's that's been ill so long. He'd thank you for them, I know."

The lad nodded with a guttural sound of assent. Then his new-born scientific ardour seemed to struggle with his rustic costiveness of speech.

"I've been just watching a queer creetur," he said at last hurriedly; "I b'leeve he's that un."

And he pulled out a well-thumbed handbook, and pointed to a cut of the grasshopper warbler.

"Whereabouts?" asked Robert, wondering the while at his own start of interest.

"In that bit of common t'other side the big pond," said Ned, pointing, his brick-red countenance kindling into suppressed excitement.

"Come and show me!" said the rector, and the two went off together. And sure enough, after a little beating about, they heard the note which had roused the lad's curiosity, the loud whirr of a creature that should have been a grasshopper, and was not.

They stalked the bird a few yards, stooping and crouching, Robert's eager hand on the boy's arm, whenever the clumsy rustic movements made too much noise among the underwood. They watched it uttering its jarring imitative note on bush after bush, just dropping

to the ground as they came near, and flitting a yard or two farther, but otherwise showing no sign of alarm at their presence. Then suddenly the impulse which had been leading him on died in the rector. He stood upright, with a long sigh.

"I must go home, Ned," he said abruptly. "Where are you off to?"

"Please, sir, there's my sister at the cottage, her as married Jim, the under-keeper. I be going there for my tea."

"Come along, then, we can go together."

They trudged along in silence; presently Robert turned on his companion.

"Ned, this natural history has been a fine thing for you, my lad; mind you stick to it. That and good work will make a man of you. When I go away——"

The boy started and stopped dead, his dumb animal eyes fixed on his companion.

"You know I shall soon be going off on my holiday," said Robert, smiling faintly; adding hurriedly as the boy's face resumed its ordinary expression: "But some day, Ned, I shall go for good. I don't know whether you've been depending on me—you and some of the others. I think perhaps you have. If so, don't depend on me, Ned, any more! It must all come to an end—everything must—*everything!*—except the struggle to be a man in the world, and not a beast—to make one's heart clean and soft, and not hard and vile. That is the *one* thing that matters, and lasts. Ah, never forget that, Ned! Never forget it!"

He stood still, towering over the slouching thick-set form beside him, his pale intensity of look giving a rare dignity and beauty to the face which owed so little of

its attractiveness to comeliness of feature. He had the makings of a true shepherd of men, and his mind as he spoke was crossed by a hundred different currents of feeling—bitterness, pain, and yearning unspeakable. No man could feel the wrench that lay before him more than he.

Ned Irwin said not a word. His heavy lids were dropped over his deep-set eye; he stood motionless, nervously fiddling with his butterfly net—awkwardness, and, as it seemed, irresponsiveness, in his whole attitude.

Robert gathered himself together.

“Well, good-night, my lad,” he said with a change of tone. “Good luck to you; be off to your tea!”

And he turned away, striding swiftly over the short burnt August grass in the direction of the Murewell woods, which rose in a blue haze of heat against the slumberous afternoon sky. He had not gone a hundred yards before he heard a clattering after him. He stopped, and Ned came up with him.

“They’re heavy, them things,” said the boy, desperately blurting it out, and pointing, with heaving chest and panting breath, to the rod and basket. “I am going that way, I can leave un at the rectory.”

Robert’s eyes gleamed.

“They are no weight, Ned—’cause why? I’ve been lazy and caught no fish! But there,”—after a moment’s hesitation he slipped off the basket and rod, and put them into the begrimed hands held out for them. “Bring them when you like; I don’t know when I shall want them again. Thank you, and God bless you!”

The boy was off with his booty in a second.

“Perhaps he’ll like to think he did it for me, by and by,” said Robert sadly to himself, moving on, a little moisture in the clear gray eye.

About three o'clock next day Robert was in Oxford. The night before he had telegraphed to ask if Grey was at home. The reply had been—"Here for a week on way north; come by all means." Oh! that look of Catherine's when he had told her of his plan, trying in vain to make it look merely casual and ordinary.

"It is more than a year since I have set eyes on Grey, Catherine. And the day's change would be a boon. I could stay the night at Merton, and get home early next day."

But as he turned a pleading look to her, he had been startled by the sudden rigidity of face and form. Her silence had in it an intense, almost a haughty, reproach, which she was too keenly hurt to put into words.

He caught her by the arm, and drew her forcibly to him. There he made her look into the eyes which were full of nothing but the most passionate imploring affection.

"Have patience a little more, Catherine!" he just murmured. "Oh, how I have blessed you for silence! Only till I come back!"

"Till you come back," she repeated slowly. "I cannot bear it any longer, Robert, that you should give others your confidence, and not me."

He groaned and let her go. No—there should be but one day more of silence, and that day was interposed for her sake. If Grey from his calmer standpoint bade him wait and test himself, before taking any irrevocable step, he would obey him. And if so, the worst pang of all need not yet be inflicted on Catherine, though as to his state of mind he would be perfectly open with her.

A few hours later his cab deposited him at the well-known door. It seemed to him that he and the scorched

plane-trees lining the sides of the road were the only living things in the wide sun-beaten street.

Every house was shut up. Only the Greys' open windows, amid their shuttered neighbours, had a friendly human air.

Yes; Mr. Grey was in, and expecting Mr. Elsmere. Robert climbed the dim familiar staircase, his heart beating fast.

"Elsmere, this *is* a piece of good fortune!"

And the two men, after a grasp of the hand, stood fronting each other: Mr. Grey, a light of pleasure on the rugged dark-complexioned face, looking up at his taller and paler visitor.

But Robert could find nothing to say in return; and in an instant Mr. Grey's quick eye detected the strained nervous emotion of the man before him.

"Come and sit down, Elsmere—there, in the window, where we can talk. One has to live on this east side of the house this weather."

"In the first place," said Mr. Grey, scrutinising him, as he returned to his own book-littered corner of the window-seat. "In the first place, my dear fellow, I can't congratulate you on your appearance. I never saw a man look in worse condition—to be up and about."

"That's nothing!" said Robert almost impatiently. "I want a holiday, I believe. Grey!" and he looked nervously out over garden and apple-trees, "I have come—very selfishly—to ask your advice; to throw a trouble upon you, to claim all your friendship can give me."

He stopped. Mr. Grey was silent—his expression changing instantly, the bright eyes profoundly, anxiously attentive.

"I have just come to the conclusion," said Robert,

after a moment, with quick abruptness, "that I ought now—at this moment—to leave the Church, and give up my living, for reasons which I will describe to you. But before I act on the conclusion, I wanted the light of your mind upon it, seeing that—that—other persons than myself are concerned."

"Give up your living!" echoed Mr. Grey in a low voice of astonishment. He sat looking at the face and figure of the man before him with a half-frowning expression. How often Robert had seen some rash exuberant youth quelled by that momentary frown! Essentially conservative as was the inmost nature of the man, for all his radicalism there were few things for which Henry Grey felt more instinctive distaste than for unsteadiness of will and purpose, however glorified by fine names. Robert knew it, and, strangely enough, felt for a moment in the presence of the heretical tutor as a culprit before a judge.

"It is, of course, a matter of opinions," he said, with an effort. "Do you remember, before I took orders, asking whether I had ever had difficulties, and I told you that I had probably never gone deep enough. It was profoundly true, though I didn't really mean it. But this year—— No, no, I have not been merely vain and hasty! I may be a shallow creature, but it has been natural growth, not wantonness."

And at last his eyes met Mr. Grey's firmly, almost with solemnity. It was as if in the last few moments he had been instinctively testing the quality of his own conduct and motives by the touchstone of the rare personality beside him; and they had stood the trial. There was such pain, such sincerity, above all such freedom from littleness of soul implied in words and look, that

Mr. Grey quickly held out his hand. Robert grasped it, and felt that the way was clear before him.

"Will you give me an account of it?" said Mr. Grey, and his tone was grave sympathy itself. "Or would you rather confine yourself to generalities and accomplished facts?"

"I will try and give you an account of it," said Robert; and sitting there with his elbows on his knees, his gaze fixed on the yellowing afternoon sky, and the intricacies of the garden-walls between them and the new Museum, he went through the history of the last two years. He described the beginnings of his historical work, the gradual enlargement of the mind's horizons, and the intrusion within them of question after question, and subject after subject. Then he mentioned the squire's name.

"Ah!" exclaimed Mr. Grey, "I had forgotten you were that man's neighbour. I wonder he didn't set you against the whole business, inhuman old cynic!"

He spoke with the strong dislike of the idealist, devoted in practice to an everyday ministry to human need, for the intellectual egotist. Robert caught and relished the old pugnacious flash in the eye, the Midland strength of accent.

"Cynic he is, not altogether inhuman, I think. I fought him about his drains and his cottages, however,"—and he smiled sadly—"before I began to read his books. But the man's genius is incontestable, his learning enormous. He found me in a susceptible state, and I recognise that his influence immensely accelerated a process already begun."

Mr. Grey was struck with the simplicity and fulness of the avowal. A lesser man would hardly have made it in the same way. Rising to pace up and down the room

—the familiar action recalling vividly to Robert the Sunday afternoons of bygone years—he began to put questions with a clearness and decision that made them so many guides to the man answering, through the tangle of his own recollections.

“I see,” said the tutor at last, his hands in the pockets of his short gray coat, his brow bent and thoughtful. “Well, the process in you has been the typical process of the present day. Abstract thought has had little or nothing to say to it. It has been all a question of literary and historical evidence. *I* am old-fashioned enough”—and he smiled—“to stick to the *à priori* impossibility of miracles, but then I am a philosopher! *You* have come to see how miracle is manufactured, to recognise in it merely a natural inevitable outgrowth of human testimony, in its pre-scientific stages. It has been all experimental, inductive. I imagine”—he looked up—“you didn’t get much help out of the orthodox apologists?”

Robert shrugged his shoulders.

“It often seemed to me,” he said drearily, “I might have got through, but for the men whose books I used to read and respect most in old days. The point of view is generally so extraordinarily limited. Westcott, for instance, who means so much nowadays to the English religious world, first isolates Christianity from all the other religious phenomena of the world, and then argues upon its details. You might as well isolate English jurisprudence, and discuss its details without any reference to Teutonic custom or Roman law! You may be as logical or as learned as you like within the limits chosen, but the whole result is false! You treat Christian witness and Biblical literature as you would treat no other witness, and no other literature in the world. And you

cannot show cause enough. For your reasons depend on the very witness under dispute. And so you go on arguing in a circle, *ad infinitum*."

But his voice dropped. The momentary eagerness died away as quickly as it had risen, leaving nothing but depression behind it.

Mr. Grey meditated. At last he said, with a delicate change of tone,—

"And now—if I may ask it, Elsmere—how far has this destructive process gone?"

"I can't tell you," said Robert, turning away almost with a groan; "I only know that the things I loved once I love still, and that—that—if I had the heart to think at all, I should see more of God in the world than I ever saw before!"

The tutor's eye flashed. Robert had gone back to the window, and was miserably looking out. After all, he had told only half his story.

"And so you feel you must give up your living?"

"What else is there for me to do?" cried Robert, turning upon him, startled by the slow deliberate tone.

"Well, of course, you know that there are many men, men with whom both you and I are acquainted, who hold very much what I imagine your opinions now are, or will settle into, who are still in the Church of England, doing admirable work there!"

"I know," said Elsmere quickly—"I know; I cannot conceive it, nor could you. Imagine standing up Sunday after Sunday to say the things you do *not* believe,—using words as a convention which those who hear you receive as literal truth,—and trusting the maintenance of your position either to your neighbour's forbearance or to your own powers of evasion! With the ideas at present in my

head, nothing would induce me to preach another Easter Day sermon to a congregation that have both a moral and a legal right to demand from me an implicit belief in the material miracle!"

"Yes," said the other gravely—"yes, I believe you are right. It can't be said the Broad Church movement has helped us much! How greatly it promised!—how little it has performed! For the private person, the worshipper, it is different—or I think so. No man pries into our prayers; and to cut ourselves off from common worship is to lose that fellowship which is in itself a witness and vehicle of God."

But his tone had grown hesitating, and touched with melancholy.

There was a moment's silence. Then Robert walked up to him again.

"At the same time," he said falteringly, standing before the elder man, as he might have stood as an undergraduate, "let me not be rash! If you think this change has been too rapid to last—if you, knowing me better than at this moment I can know myself—if you bid me wait a while, before I take any overt step, I will wait—oh, God knows I will wait—my wife——" and his husky voice failed him utterly.

"Your wife!" cried Mr. Grey, startled. "Mrs. Elsmere does not know?"

"My wife knows nothing, or almost nothing—and it will break her heart!"

He moved hastily away again, and stood with his back to his friend, his tall narrow form outlined against the window. Mr. Grey was left in dismay, rapidly turning over the impressions of Catherine left on him by his last year's sight of her. That pale distinguished woman

with her look of strength and character,—he remembered Langham's analysis of her, and of the silent religious intensity she had brought with her from her training among the northern hills.

Was there a bitterly human tragedy preparing under all this thought-drama he had been listening to?

Deeply moved, he went up to Robert, and laid his rugged hand almost timidly upon him.

"Elsmere, it won't break her heart! You are a good man. She is a good woman." What an infinity of meaning there was in the simple words! "Take courage. Tell her at once—tell her everything—and let *her* decide whether there shall be any waiting. I cannot help you there; she can; she will probably understand you better than you understand yourself."

He tightened his grasp, and gently pushed his guest into a chair beside him. Robert was deadly pale, his face quivering painfully. The long physical strain of the past months had weakened for the moment all the controlling forces of the will. Mr. Grey stood over him—the whole man dilating, expanding, under a tyrannous stress of feeling.

"It is hard, it is bitter," he said slowly, with a wonderful manly tenderness. "I know it, I have gone through it. So has many and many a poor soul that you and I have known! But there need be no sting in the wound unless we ourselves envenom it. I know—oh! I know very well—the man of the world scoffs, but to him who has once been a Christian of the old sort, the parting with the Christian mythology is the rending asunder of bones and marrow. It means parting with half the confidence, half the joy, of life! But take heart," and the tone grew still more solemn, still more penetrating. "It

is the education of God! Do not imagine it will put you farther from Him! He is in criticism, in science, in doubt, so long as the doubt is a pure and honest doubt, as yours is. He is in all life, in all thought. The thought of man, as it has shaped itself in institutions, in philosophies, in science, in patient critical work, or in the life of charity, is the one continuous revelation of God! Look for Him in it all; see how, little by little, the Divine indwelling force, using as its tools—but *merely* as its tools!—man's physical appetites and conditions, has built up conscience and the moral life; think how every faculty of the mind has been trained in turn to take its part in the great work of faith upon the visible world! Love and imagination built up religion,—shall reason destroy it? No!—reason is God's like the rest! Trust it,—trust him. The leading strings of the past are dropping from you; they are dropping from the world, not wantonly, or by chance, but in the providence of God. Learn the lesson of your own pain,—learn to seek God, not in any single event of past history, *but in your own soul*,—in the constant verifications of experience, in the life of Christian love. Spiritually you have gone through the last wrench, I promise it you! You being what you are, nothing can cut this ground from under your feet. Whatever may have been the forms of human belief, *faith*, the faith which saves, has always been rooted here! All things change,—creeds and philosophies and outward systems,—but God remains!

“‘Life, that in me has rest,
As I, undying Life, have power in Thee!’”

The lines dropped with low vibrating force from lips unaccustomed indeed to such an outburst. The speaker stood a moment longer in silence beside the figure in the chair,

and it seemed to Robert, gazing at him with fixed eyes, that the man's whole presence, at once so homely and so majestic, was charged with benediction. It was as though invisible hands of healing and consecration had been laid upon him. The fiery soul beside him had kindled anew the drooping life of his own. So the torch of God passes on its way, hand reaching out to hand.

He bent forward, stammering incoherent words of assent and gratitude, he knew not what. Mr. Grey, who had sunk into his chair, gave him time to recover himself. The intensity of the tutor's own mood relaxed; and presently he began to talk to his guest, in a wholly different tone, of the practical detail of the step before him, supposing it to be taken immediately, discussing the probable attitude of Robert's bishop, the least conspicuous mode of withdrawing from the living, and so on—all with gentleness and sympathy indeed, but with an indefinable change of manner, which showed that he felt it well both for himself and Elsmere to repress any further expression of emotion. There was something, a vein of stoicism perhaps, in Mr. Grey's temper of mind, which, while it gave a special force and sacredness to his rare moments of fervent speech, was wont in general to make men more self-controlled than usual in his presence. Robert felt now the bracing force of it.

"Will you stay with us to dinner?" Mr. Grey asked when at last Elsmere got up to go. "There are one or two lone Fellows coming—asked before your telegram came, of course. Do exactly as you like."

"I think not," said Robert, after a pause. "I longed to see you, but I am not fit for general society."

Mr. Grey did not press him. He rose and went with his visitor to the door.

“Good-bye, good-bye! Let me always know what I can do for you. And your wife—poor thing, poor thing! Go and tell her, Elsmere; don’t lose a moment you can help. God help her and you!”

They grasped each other’s hands. Mr. Grey followed him down the stairs and along the narrow hall. He opened the hall door, and smiled a last smile of encouragement and sympathy into the eyes that expressed such a young moved gratitude. The door closed. Little did Elsmere realise that never, in this life, would he see that smile or hear that voice again!

CHAPTER XXVIII.

IN half an hour from the time Mr. Grey’s door closed upon him, Elsmere had caught a convenient cross-country train, and had left the Oxford towers and spires, the shrunken summer Isis, and the flat hot river meadows far behind him. He had meant to stay at Merton, as we know, for the night. Now, his one thought was to get back to Catherine. The urgency of Mr. Grey’s words was upon him, and love had a miserable pang that it should have needed to be urged.

By eight o’clock he was again at Churton. There were no carriages waiting at the little station, but the thought of the walk across the darkening common through the August moon-rise had been a refreshment to him in the heat and crowd of the train. He hurried through the small town, where the streets were full of summer idlers, and the lamps were twinkling in the still balmy air, along a dusty stretch of road, leaving man and his dwellings farther and farther to the rear of him, till at

last he emerged on a boundless tract of common, and struck to the right into a cart-track leading to Murewell.

He was on the top of a high sandy ridge, looking west and north, over a wide evening world of heather and wood and hill. To the right, far ahead, across the misty lower grounds into which he was soon to plunge, rose the woods of Murewell, black and massive in the twilight distance. To the left, but on a nearer plane, the undulating common stretching downwards from where he stood rose suddenly towards a height crowned with a group of gaunt and jagged firs—landmarks for all the plain—of which every ghostly bough and crest was now sharply outlined against a luminous sky. For the wide heaven in front of him was still delicately glowing in all its under parts with soft harmonies of dusky red or blue, while in its higher zone the same tract of sky was closely covered with the finest net-work of pearl-white cloud, suffused at the moment with a silver radiance so intense that a spectator might almost have dreamed the moon had forgotten its familiar place of rising, and was about to mount into a startled expectant west. Not a light in all the wide expanse, and for a while not a sound of human life, save the beat of Robert's step, or the occasional tap of his stick against the pebbles of the road.

Presently he reached the edge of the ridge whence the rough track he was following sank sharply to the lower levels. Here was a marvellous point of view, and the rector stood a moment, beside a bare weather-blasted fir, a ghostly shadow thrown behind him. All around the gorse and heather seemed still radiating light, as though the air had been so drenched in sunshine that even long after the sun had vanished the invading darkness found itself still unable to win firm possession of

earth and sky. Every little stone in the sandy road was still weirdly visible; the colour of the heather, now in lavish bloom, could be felt though hardly seen.

Before him melted line after line of woodland, broken by hollow after hollow, filled with vaporous wreaths of mist. About him were the sounds of a wild nature. The air was resonant with the purring of the night-jars, and every now and then he caught the loud clap of their wings as they swayed unsteadily through the furze and bracken. Overhead a trio of wild ducks flew across, from pond to pond, their hoarse cry descending through the darkness. The partridges on the hill called to each other, and certain sharp sounds betrayed to the solitary listener the presence of a flock of swans on a neighbouring pool.

The rector felt himself alone on a wide earth. It was almost with a start of pleasure that he caught at last the barking of dogs on a few distant farms, or the dim thunderous rush of a train through the wide wooded landscape beyond the heath. Behind that frowning mass of wood lay the rectory. The lights must be lit in the little drawing-room; Catherine must be sitting by the lamp, her fine head bent over book or work, grieving for him perhaps, her anxious expectant heart going out to him through the dark. He thinks of the village lying wrapped in the peace of the August night, the lamp rays from shop-front or casement streaming out on to the green; he thinks of his child, of his dead mother, feeling heavy and bitter within him all the time the message of separation and exile.

But his mood was no longer one of mere dread, of helpless pain, of miserable self-scorn. Contact with Henry Grey had brought him that rekindling of the

flame of conscience, that medicinal stirring of the soul's waters, which is the most precious boon that man can give to man. In that sense which attaches to every successive resurrection of our best life from the shades of despair or selfishness, he had that day, almost that hour, been born again. He was no longer filled mainly with the sense of personal failure, with scorn for his own blundering impetuous temper, so lacking in prescience and in balance; or, in respect to his wife, with such an anguished impotent remorse. He was nerved and braced; whatever oscillations the mind might go through in its search for another equilibrium, to-night there was a moment of calm. The earth to him was once more full of God, existence full of value.

"The things I have always loved, I love still!" he had said to Mr. Grey. And in this healing darkness it was as if the old loves, the old familiar images of thought, returned to him new-clad, re-entering the desolate heart in a white-winged procession of consolation. On the heath beside him the Christ stood once more, and as the disciple felt the sacred presence he could bear for the first time to let the chafing pent-up current of love flow into the new channels, so painfully prepared for it by the toil of thought. "*Either God or an impostor.*" What scorn the heart, the intellect, threw on the alternative! Not in the dress of speculations which represent the product of long past, long superseded looms of human thought, but in the guise of common manhood, laden like his fellows with the pathetic weight of human weakness and human ignorance, the Master moves towards him—

"Like you, my son, I struggled and I prayed. Like you, I had my days of doubt and nights of wrestling. I had my dreams, my delusions, with my fellows. I was

weak; I suffered; I died. But God was in me, and the courage, the patience, the love He gave to me, the scenes of the poor human life He inspired, have become by His will the world's eternal lesson—man's primer of Divine things, hung high in the eyes of all, simple and wise, that all may see and all may learn. Take it to your heart again—that life, that pain, of mine! Use it to new ends; apprehend it in new ways; but knowledge shall not take it from you; and love, instead of weakening or forgetting, if it be but faithful, shall find ever fresh power of realising and renewing itself.”

So said the vision; and carrying the passion of it deep in his heart the rector went his way, down the long stony hill, past the solitary farm amid the trees at the foot of it, across the grassy common beyond, with its sentinel clumps of beeches, past an ethereal string of tiny lakes just touched by the moon-rise, beside some of the first cottages of Murewell, up the hill, with pulse beating and step quickening, and round into the stretch of road leading to his own gate.

As soon as he had passed the screen made by the shrubs on the lawn, he saw it all as he had seen it in his waking dream on the common—the lamplight, the open windows, the white muslin curtains swaying a little in the soft evening air, and Catherine's figure seen dimly through them.

The noise of the gate, however—of the steps on the drive—had startled her. He saw her rise quickly from her low chair, put some work down beside her, and move in haste to the window.

“Robert!” she cried in amazement.

“Yes,” he answered, still some yards from her, his voice coming strangely to her out of the moonlit dark-

ness. "I did my errand early; I found I could get back; and here I am."

She flew to the door, opened it, and felt herself caught in his arms.

"Robert, you are quite damp!" she said, fluttering and shrinking, for all her sweet habitual gravity of manner—was it the passion of that yearning embrace? "Have you walked?"

"Yes. It is the dew on the common, I suppose. The grass was drenched."

"Will you have some food? They can bring back the supper directly."

"I don't want any food now," he said, hanging up his hat. "I got some lunch in town, and a cup of soup at Reading coming back. Perhaps you will give me some tea soon—not yet."

He came up to her, pushing back the thick disordered locks of hair from his eyes with one hand, the other held out to her. As he came under the light of the hall lamp she was so startled by the gray pallor of the face that she caught hold of his outstretched hand with both hers. What she said he never knew—her look was enough. He put his arm round her, and as he opened the drawing-room door holding her pressed against him, she felt the desperate agitation in him penetrating, beating against an almost iron self-control of manner. He shut the door behind them.

"Robert, dear Robert!" she said, clinging to him, "there is bad news,—tell me—there is something to tell me! Oh! what is it—what is it?"

It was almost like a child's wail. His brow contracted still more painfully.

"My darling," he said; "my darling—my dear dear

wife!" and he bent his head down to her as she lay against his breast, kissing her hair with a passion of pity, of remorse, of tenderness, which seemed to rend his whole nature.

"Tell me—tell me—Robert!"

He guided her gently across the room, past the sofa over which her work lay scattered, past the flower-table, now a many-coloured mass of roses, which was her especial pride, past the remains of a brick castle which had delighted Mary's wondering eyes and mischievous fingers an hour or two before, to a low chair by the open window looking on the wide moonlit expanse of cornfield. He put her into it, walked to the window on the other side of the room, shut it, and drew down the blind. Then he went back to her, and sank down beside her, kneeling, her hands in his.

"My dear wife—you have loved me—you do love me?"

She could not answer, she could only press his hands with her cold fingers, with a look and gesture that implored him to speak.

"Catherine," he said, still kneeling before her, "you remember that night you came down to me in the study, the night I told you I was in trouble and you could not help me. Did you guess from what I said what the trouble was?"

"Yes," she answered, trembling, "yes, I did, Robert; I thought you were depressed—troubled—about religion."

"And I know," he said with an outburst of feeling, kissing her hands as they lay in his—"I know very well that you went upstairs and prayed for me, my white-souled angel! But Catherine, the trouble grew—it got blacker and blacker. You were there beside me, and you could not help me. I dared not tell you about it;

I could only struggle on alone, so terribly alone, sometimes; and now I am beaten, beaten. And I come to you to ask you to help me in the only thing that remains to me. Help me, Catherine, to be an honest man—to follow conscience—to say and do the truth!”

“Robert,” she said piteously, deadly pale, “I don’t understand.”

“Oh, my poor darling!” he cried, with a kind of moan of pity and misery. Then still holding her, he said, with strong deliberate emphasis, looking into the gray-blue eyes—the quivering face so full of austerity and delicacy,—

“For six or seven months, Catherine—really for much longer, though I never knew it—I have been fighting with *doubt*—doubt of orthodox Christianity—doubt of what the Church teaches—of what I have to say and preach every Sunday. First it crept on me I knew not how. Then the weight grew heavier, and I began to struggle with it. I felt I must struggle with it. Many men, I suppose, in my position would have trampled on their doubts—would have regarded them as sin in themselves, would have felt it their duty to ignore them as much as possible, trusting to time and God’s help. I *could* not ignore them. The thought of questioning the most sacred beliefs that you and I”—and his voice faltered a moment—“held in common was misery to me. On the other hand, I knew myself. I knew that I could no more go on living to any purpose, with a whole region of the mind shut up, as it were, barred away from the rest of me, than I could go on living with a secret between myself and you. I could not hold my faith by a mere tenure of tyranny and fear. Faith that is not free—that is not the faith of the whole creature, body,

soul, and intellect—seemed to me a faith worthless both to God and man!”

Catherine looked at him stupefied. The world seemed to be turning round her. Infinitely more terrible than his actual words was the accent running through words and tone and gesture—the accent of irreparableness, as of something dismally *done* and *finished*. What did it all mean? For what had he brought her there? She sat stunned, realising with awful force the feebleness, the inadequacy, of her own fears.

He, meanwhile, had paused a moment, meeting her gaze with those yearning sunken eyes. Then he went on, his voice changing a little,—

“But if I had wished it ever so much, I could not have helped myself. The process, so to speak, had gone too far by the time I knew where I was. I think the change must have begun before the Mile End time. Looking back, I see the foundations were laid in—in—the work of last winter.”

She shivered. He stooped and kissed her hands again passionately. “Am I poisoning even the memory of our past for you?” he cried. Then, restraining himself at once, he hurried on again: “After Mile End you remember I began to see much of the squire. Oh, my wife, don’t look at me so! It was not his doing in any true sense. I am not such a weak shuttlecock as that! But being where I was before our intimacy began, his influence hastened everything. I don’t wish to minimise it. I was not made to stand alone!”

And again that bitter, perplexed, half-scornful sense of his own pliancy at the hands of circumstance as compared with the rigidity of other men descended upon

him. Catherine made a faint movement as though to draw her hands away.

"Was it well," she said, in a voice which sounded like a harsh echo of her own, "was it right for a clergyman to discuss sacred things—with such a man?"

He let her hands go, guided for the moment by a delicate imperious instinct which bade him appeal to something else than love. Rising, he sat down opposite to her on the low window seat, while she sank back into her chair, her fingers clinging to the arm of it, the lamp-light far behind deepening all the shadows of the face, the hollows in the cheeks, the line of experience and will about the mouth. The stupor in which she had just listened to him was beginning to break up. Wild forces of condemnation and resistance were rising in her; and he knew it. He knew, too, that as yet she only half realised the situation, and that blow after blow still remained to him to deal.

"Was it right that I should discuss religious matters with the squire?" he repeated, his face resting on his hands. "What are religious matters, Catherine, and what are not?"

Then, still controlling himself rigidly, his eyes fixed on the shadowy face of his wife, his ear catching her quick uneven breath, he went once more through the dismal history of the last few months, dwelling on his state of thought before the intimacy with Mr. Wendover began, on his first attempts to escape the squire's influence, on his gradual pitiful surrender. Then he told the story of the last memorable walk before the squire's journey, of the moment in the study afterwards, and of the months of feverish reading and wrestling which had followed. Half-way through it a new despair seized him.

What was the good of all he was saying? He was speaking a language she did not really understand. What were all these critical and literary considerations to her?

The rigidity of her silence showed him that her sympathy was not with him, that in comparison with the vibrating protest of her own passionate faith which must be now ringing through her, whatever he could urge must seem to her the merest culpable trifling with the soul's awful destinies. In an instant of tumultuous speech he could not convey to her the temper and results of his own complex training, and on that training, as he very well knew, depended the piercing, convincing force of all that he was saying. There were gulfs between them—gulfs which, as it seemed to him, in a miserable insight, could never be bridged again. Oh, the frightful separateness of experience!

Still he struggled on. He brought the story down to the conversation at the Hall, described—in broken words of fire and pain—the moment of spiritual wreck which had come upon him in the August lane, his night of struggle, his resolve to go to Mr. Grey. And all through he was not so much narrating as pleading a cause, and that not his own, but Love's. Love was at the bar, and it was for love that the eloquent voice, the pale varying face, were really pleading, through all the long story of intellectual change.

At the mention of Mr. Grey Catherine grew restless; she sat up suddenly, with a cry of bitterness.

"Robert, why did you go away from me? It was cruel. I should have known first. He had no right—no right!"

She clasped her hands round her knees, her beautiful mouth set and stern. The moon had been sailing westward all this time, and as Catherine bent forward

the yellow light caught her face, and brought out the haggard change in it. He held out his hands to her with a low groan, helpless against her reproach, her jealousy. He dared not speak of what Mr. Grey had done for him, of the tenderness of his counsel towards her specially. He felt that everything he could say would but torture the wounded heart still more.

But she did not notice the outstretched hands. She covered her face in silence a moment, as though trying to see her way more clearly through the mazes of disaster; and he waited. At last she looked up.

"I cannot follow all you have been saying," she said, almost harshly. "I know so little of books, I cannot give them the place you do. You say you have convinced yourself the Gospels are like other books, full of mistakes, and credulous, like the people of the time; and therefore you can't take what they say as you used to take it. But what does it all quite mean? Oh, I am not clever—I cannot see my way clear from thing to thing as you do. If there are mistakes, does it matter so—so—terribly to you?" and she faltered. "Do you think *nothing* is true because something may be false? Did not—did not—Jesus still live, and die, and rise again?—*can* you doubt—*do* you doubt—that He rose—that He is God—that He is in heaven—that we shall see Him?"

She threw an intensity into every word, which made the short breathless questions thrill through him, through the nature saturated and steeped as hers was in Christian association, with a bitter accusing force. But he did not flinch from them.

"I can believe no longer in an Incarnation and Resurrection," he said slowly, but with a resolute plainness. "Christ is risen in our hearts, in the Christian life of

charity. Miracle is a natural product of human feeling and imagination; and God was in Jesus—pre-eminently, as He is in all great souls, but not otherwise—not otherwise in kind than He is in me or you.”

His voice dropped to a whisper. She grew paler and paler.

“So to you,” she said presently in the same strange altered voice, “my father—when I saw that light on his face before he died, when I heard him cry, ‘Master, *I come!*’ was dying—deceived—deluded. Perhaps even,” and she trembled, “you think it ends here—our life—our love?”

It was agony to him to see her driving herself through this piteous catechism. The lantern of memory flashed a moment on to the immortal picture of Faust and Margaret. Was it not only that winter they had read the scene together?

Forcibly he possessed himself once more of those closely locked hands, pressing their coldness on his own burning eyes and forehead in hopeless silence.

“*Do* you, Robert?” she repeated insistently.

“I know nothing,” he said, his eyes still hidden. “I know nothing! But I trust God with all that is dearest to me, with our love, with the soul that is His breath, His work in us!”

The pressure of her despair seemed to be wringing his own faith out of him, forcing into definiteness things and thoughts that had been lying in an accepted, even a welcomed, obscurity.

She tried again to draw her hands away, but he would not let them go. “And the end of it all, Robert?” she said—“the end of it?”

Never did he forget the note of that question, the

desolation of it, the indefinable change of accent. It drove him into a harsh abruptness of reply.

"The end of it—so far—must be, if I remain an honest man, that I must give up my living, that I must cease to be a minister of the Church of England. What the course of our life after that shall be is in your hands—absolutely."

She caught her breath painfully. His heart was breaking for her, and yet there was something in her manner now which kept down caresses and repressed all words.

Suddenly, however, as he sat there mutely watching her, he found her at his knees, her dear arms around him, her face against his breast.

"Robert, my husband, my darling, it *cannot* be! It is a madness—a delusion. God is trying you, and me! You cannot be planning so to desert Him, so to deny Christ—you cannot, my husband. Come away with me, away from books and work, into some quiet place where He can make Himself heard. You are overdone, overdriven. Do nothing now—say nothing—except to me. Be patient a little, and He will give you back Himself! What can books and arguments matter to you or me? Have we not *known* and *felt* Him as he He is—have we not, Robert? Come!"

She pushed herself backwards, smiling at him with an exquisite tenderness. The tears were streaming down her cheeks. They were wet on his own. Another moment and Robert would have lost the only clue which remained to him through the mists of this bewildering world. He would have yielded again as he had many times yielded before, for infinitely less reason, to the urgent pressure of another's individuality, and having jeopardised love for

truth, he would now have murdered—or tried to murder—in himself the sense of truth for love.

But he did neither.

Holding her close pressed against him, he said in breaks of intense speech: "If you wish, Catherine, I will wait—I will wait till you bid me speak—but I warn you—there is something dead in me—something gone and broken. It can never live again—except in forms which now it would only pain you more to think of. It is not that I think differently of this point or that point—but of life and religion altogether. I see God's purposes in quite other proportions as it were. Christianity seems to me something small and local. Behind it, around it—including it—I see the great drama of the world, sweeping on—led by God—from change to change, from act to act. It is not that Christianity is false, but that it is only an imperfect human reflection of a part of truth. Truth has never been, can never be, contained in any one creed or system!"

She heard, but through her exhaustion, through the bitter sinking of hope, she only half understood. Only she realised that she and he were alike helpless—both struggling in the grip of some force outside themselves, inexorable, ineluctable.

Robert felt her arms relaxing, felt the dead weight of her form against him. He raised her to her feet, he half carried her to the door, and on to the stairs. She was nearly fainting, but her will held it at bay. He threw open the door of their room, led her in, lifted her—unresisting—on to the bed. Then her head fell to one side, and her lips grew ashen. In an instant or two he had done for her all that his medical knowledge could suggest with rapid decided hands. She was not quite

unconscious; she drew up round her, as though with a strong vague sense of chill, the shawl he laid over her, and gradually the slightest shade of colour came back to her lips. But as soon as she opened her eyes and met those of Robert fixed upon her, the heavy lids dropped again.

"Would you rather be alone?" he said to her, kneeling beside her.

She made a faint affirmative movement of the head, and the cold hand he had been chafing tried feebly to withdraw itself. He rose at once, and stood a moment beside her, looking down at her. Then he went.

CHAPTER XXIX.

HE shut the door softly, and went downstairs again. It was between ten and eleven. The lights in the lower passage were just extinguished; every one else in the house had gone to bed. Mechanically he stooped and put away the child's bricks, he pushed the chairs back into their places, and then he paused a while before the open window. But there was not a tremor on the set face. He felt himself capable of no more emotion. The fount of feeling, of pain, was for the moment dried up. What he was mainly noticing was the effect of some occasional gusts of night-wind on the moonlit cornfield; the silver ripples they sent through it; the shadows thrown by some great trees in the western corners of the field; the glory of the moon itself in the pale immensity of the sky.

Presently he turned away, leaving one lamp still burning in the room, softly unlocked the hall door, took his

hat, and went out. He walked up and down the wood-path or sat on the bench there for some time, thinking indeed, but thinking with a certain stern practical dryness. Whenever he felt the thrill of feeling stealing over him again, he would make a sharp effort at repression. Physically he could not bear much more, and he knew it. A part remained for him to play, which must be played with tact, with prudence, and with firmness. Strength and nerves had been sufficiently weakened already. For his wife's sake, his people's sake, his honourable reputation's sake, he must guard himself from a collapse which might mean far more than physical failure.

So in the most patient methodical way he began to plan out the immediate future. As to waiting, the matter was still in Catherine's hand; but he knew that finely tempered soul; he knew that when she had mastered her poor woman's self, as she had always mastered it from her childhood, she would not bid him wait. He hardly took the possibility into consideration. The proposal had had some reality in his eyes when he went to see Mr. Grey; now it had none, though he could hardly have explained why.

He had already made arrangements with an old Oxford friend to take his duty during his absence on the Continent. It had been originally suggested that this Mr. Armitstead should come to Murewell on the Monday following the Sunday they were now approaching, spend a few days with them before their departure, and be left to his own devices in the house and parish, about the Thursday or Friday. An intense desire now seized Robert to get hold of the man at once, before the next Sunday. It was strange how the interview with his wife seemed to have crystallised, precipitated, everything. How

infinitely more real the whole matter looked to him since the afternoon! It had passed—at any rate for the time—out of the region of thought, into the hurrying evolution of action, and as soon as action began it was characteristic of Robert's rapid energetic nature to feel this thirst, to make it as prompt, as complete, as possible. The fiery soul yearned for a fresh consistency, though it were a consistency of loss and renunciation.

To-morrow he must write to the bishop. The bishop's residence was only eight or ten miles from Murewell; he supposed his interview with him would take place about Monday or Tuesday. He could see the tall stooping figure of the kindly old man rising to meet him; he knew exactly the sort of arguments that would be brought to bear upon him. Oh, that it were done with—this wearisome dialectical necessity! His life for months had been one long argument. If he were but left free to feel, and live again!

The practical matter which weighed most heavily upon him was the function connected with the opening of the new Institute, which had been fixed for the Saturday—the next day but one. How was he—but much more how was Catherine—to get through it? His lips would be sealed as to any possible withdrawal from the living, for he could not by then have seen the bishop. He looked forward to the gathering, the crowds, the local enthusiasm, the signs of his own popularity, with a sickening distaste. The one thing real to him through it all would be Catherine's white face, and their bitter joint consciousness.

And then he said to himself, sharply, that his own feelings counted for nothing. Catherine should be tenderly shielded from all avoidable pain, but for himself

there must be no flinching, no self-indulgent weakness. Did he not owe every last hour he had to give to the people amongst whom he had planned to spend the best energies of life, and from whom his own act was about to part him in this lame impotent fashion?

Midnight! The sounds rolled silverly out, effacing the soft murmurs of the night. So the long interminable day was over, and a new morning had begun. He rose, listening to the echoes of the bell, and—as the tide of feeling surged back upon him—passionately commending the new-born day to God.

Then he turned towards the house, put the light out in the drawing-room, and went upstairs, stepping cautiously. He opened the door of Catherine's room. The moonlight was streaming in through the white blinds. Catherine, who had undressed, was lying now with her face hidden in the pillow, and one white-sleeved arm flung across little Mary's cot. The night was hot, and the child would evidently have thrown off all its coverings had it not been for the mother's hand, which lay lightly on the tiny shoulder, keeping one thin blanket in its place.

"Catherine," he whispered, standing beside her.

She turned, and by the light of the candle he held shaded from her he saw the austere remoteness of her look, as of one who had been going through deep waters of misery, alone with God. His heart sank. For the first time that look seemed to exclude him from her inmost life.

He sank down beside her, took the hand lying on the child, and laid down his head upon it, mutely kissing it. But he said nothing. Of what further avail could words be just then to either of them? Only he felt through

every fibre the coldness, the irresponsiveness of those fingers lying in his.

"Would it prevent your sleeping," he asked her presently, "if I came to read here, as I used to when you were ill? I could shade the light from you, of course."

She raised her head suddenly.

"But you—you ought to sleep."

Her tone was anxious, but strangely quiet and aloof.

"Impossible!" he said, pressing his hand over his eyes as he rose. "At any rate I will read first."

His sleeplessness at any time of excitement or strain was so inveterate, and so familiar to them both by now, that she could say nothing. She turned away with a long sobbing breath, which seemed to go through her from head to foot. He stood a moment beside her, fighting strong impulses of remorse and passion, and ultimately maintaining silence and self-control.

In another minute or two he was sitting beside her feet, in a low chair drawn to the edge of the bed, the light arranged so as to reach his book without touching either mother or child. He had run over the book-shelf in his own room, shrinking painfully from any of his common religious favourites as one shrinks from touching a still sore and throbbing nerve, and had at last carried off a volume of Spenser.

And so the night began to wear away. For the first hour or two, every now and then, a stifled sob would make itself just faintly heard. It was a sound to wring the heart, for what it meant was that not even Catherine Elsmere's extraordinary powers of self-suppression could avail to check the outward expression of an inward torture. Each time it came and went, it seemed to Elsmere that a fraction of his youth went with it.

At last exhaustion brought her a restless sleep. As soon as Elsmere caught the light breathing which told him she was not conscious of her grief, or of him, his book slipped on to his knee.

“Open the temple gates unto my love,
Open them wide that she may enter in,
And all the posts adorn as doth behove,
And all the pillars deck with garlands trim,
For to receive this saint with honour due
That cometh in to you.
With trembling steps and humble reverence,
She cometh in before the Almighty's view.”

The leaves fell over as the book dropped, and these lines, which had been to him, as to other lovers, the utterance of his own bridal joy, emerged. They brought about him a host of images—a little gray church penetrated everywhere by the roar of a swollen river; outside, a road filled with empty farmers' carts, and shouting children carrying branches of mountain-ash—winding on and up into the heart of wild hills dyed with reddening fern, the sun-gleams stealing from crag to crag, and shoulder to shoulder; inside, row after row of intent faces, all turned towards the central passage, and, moving towards him, a figure “clad all in white, that seems a virgin best,” whose every step brings nearer to him the heaven of his heart's desire. Everything is plain to him—Mrs. Thornburgh's round cheeks and marvellous curls and jubilant airs, Mrs. Leyburn's mild and tearful pleasure, the vicar's solid satisfaction. With what confiding joy had those who loved her given her to him! And he knows well that out of all griefs, the grief he has brought upon her in two short years is the one which will seem to her hardest to bear. Very few women of the present

day could feel this particular calamity as Catherine Elsmere must feel it.

"Was it a crime to love and win you, my darling?" he cried to her in his heart. "Ought I to have had more self-knowledge? could I have guessed where I was taking you? Oh, how could I know — how could I know."

But it was impossible to him to sink himself wholly in the past. Inevitably such a nature as Elsmere's turns very quickly from despair to hope; from the sense of failure to the passionate planning of new effort. In time will he not be able to comfort her, and, after a miserable moment of transition, to repair her trust in him and make their common life once more rich towards God and man? There must be painful readjustment and friction, no doubt. He tries to see the facts as they truly are, fighting against his own optimist tendencies, and realising as best he can all the changes which his great change must introduce into their most intimate relations. But after all, can love and honesty and a clear conscience do nothing to bridge over, nay, to efface, such differences as theirs will be?

Oh to bring her to understand him! At this moment he shrinks painfully from the thought of touching her faith—his own sense of loss is too heavy, too terrible. But if she will only be still open with him!—still give him her deepest heart, any lasting difference between them will surely be impossible. Each will complete the other, and love knit up the ravelled strands again into a stronger unity.

Gradually he lost himself in half-articulate prayer, in the solemn girding of the will to this future task of a recreating love. And by the time the morning light had

well established itself sleep had fallen on him. When he became sensible of the longed-for drowsiness, he merely stretched out a tired hand and drew over him a shawl hanging at the foot of the bed. He was too utterly worn out to think of moving.

When he woke the sun was streaming into the room, and behind him sat the tiny Mary on the edge of the bed, the rounded apple cheeks and wild-bird eyes aglow with mischief and delight. She had climbed out of her cot, and, finding no check to her progress, had crept on, till now she sat triumphantly, with one diminutive leg and rosy foot doubled under her, and her father's thick hair at the mercy of her invading fingers, which, however, were as yet touching him half timidly, as though something in his sleep had awed the baby sense.

But Catherine was gone.

He sprang up with a start. Mary was frightened by the abrupt movement, perhaps disappointed by the escape of her prey, and raised a sudden wail.

He carried her to her nurse, even forgetting to kiss the little wet cheek, ascertained that Catherine was not in the house, and then came back, miserable, with the bewilderment of sleep still upon him. A sense of wrong rose high within him. How *could* she have left him thus without a word?

It had been her way, sometimes, during the summer, to go out early to one or other of the sick folk who were under her especial charge. Possibly she had gone to a woman, just confined, on the farther side of the village, who yesterday had been in danger.

But, whatever explanation he could make for himself, he was none the less irrationally wretched. He bathed, dressed, and sat down to his solitary meal in a state of

tension and agitation indescribable. All the exaltation, the courage of the night, was gone.

Nine o'clock, ten o'clock, and no sign of Catherine.

"Your mistress must have been detained somewhere," he said as quietly and carelessly as he could to Susan, the parlour-maid, who had been with them since their marriage. "Leave breakfast things for one."

"Mistress took a cup of milk when she went out, cook says," observed the little maid with a consoling intention, wondering the while at the rector's haggard mien and restless movements.

"Nursing other people indeed!" she observed severely downstairs, glad as we all are at times to pick holes in excellence which is inconveniently high. "Missis had a deal better stay at home and nurse *him!*"

The day was excessively hot. Not a leaf moved in the garden; over the cornfield the air danced in long vibrations of heat; the woods and hills beyond were indistinct and colourless. Their dog Dandy lay sleeping in the sun, waking up every now and then to avenge himself on the flies. On the far edge of the cornfield reaping was beginning. Robert stood on the edge of the sunk fence, his blind eyes resting on the line of men, his ear catching the shouts of the farmer directing operations from his gray horse. He could do nothing. The night before, in the wood-path, he had clearly mapped out the day's work. A mass of business was waiting, clamouring to be done. He tried to begin on this or that, and gave up everything with a groan, wandering out again to the gate on to the wood-path to sweep the distances of road or field with hungry straining eyes.

The wildest fears had taken possession of him. Running in his head was a passage from *The Confessions*,

describing Monica's horror of her son's heretical opinions. "Shrinking from and detesting the blasphemies of his error, she began to doubt whether it was right in her to allow her son to live in her house and to eat at the same table with her;" and the mother's heart, he remembered, could only be convinced of the lawfulness of its own yearning by a prophetic vision of the youth's conversion. He recalled, with a shiver, how in the life of Madame Guyon, after describing the painful and agonising death of a kind but comparatively irreligious husband, she quietly adds, "As soon as I heard that my husband had just expired, I said to Thee, O my God, Thou hast broken my bonds, and I will offer to Thee a sacrifice of praise!" He thought of John Henry Newman, disowning all the ties of kinship with his younger brother because of divergent views on the question of baptismal regeneration; of the long tragedy of Blanco White's life, caused by the slow dropping-off of friend after friend, on the ground of heretical belief. What right had he, or any one in such a strait as his, to assume that the faith of the present is no longer capable of the same stern self-destructive consistency as the faith of the past? He knew that to such Christian purity, such Christian inwardness as Catherine's, the ultimate sanction and legitimacy of marriage rest, both in theory and practice, on a common acceptance of the definite commands and promises of a miraculous revelation. He had had a proof of it in Catherine's passionate repugnance to the idea of Rose's marriage with Edward Langham.

Eleven o'clock striking from the distant tower. He walked desperately along the wood-path, meaning to go through the copse at the end of it towards the park, and

look there. He had just passed into the copse, a thick interwoven mass of young trees, when he heard the sound of the gate which on the farther side of it led on to the road. He hurried on; the trees closed behind him; the grassy path broadened; and there, under an arch of young oak and hazel, stood Catherine, arrested by the sound of his step. He, too, stopped at the sight of her; he could not go on. Husband and wife looked at each other one long quivering moment. Then Catherine sprang forward with a sob and threw herself on his breast.

They clung to each other, she in a passion of tears—tears of such self-abandonment as neither Robert nor any other living soul had ever seen Catherine Elsmere shed before. As for him he was trembling from head to foot, his arms scarcely strong enough to hold her, his young worn face bent down over her.

“Oh, Robert!” she sobbed at last, putting up her hand and touching his hair, “you look so pale, so sad.”

“I have you again!” he said simply.

A thrill of remorse ran through her.

“I went away,” she murmured, her face still hidden—“I went away, because when I woke up it all seemed to me, suddenly, too ghastly to be believed; I could not stay still and bear it. But, Robert, Robert, I kissed you as I passed! I was so thankful you could sleep a little and forget. I hardly know where I have been most of the time—I think I have been sitting in a corner of the park, where no one ever comes. I began to think of all you said to me last night—to put it together—to try and understand it, and it seemed to me more and more horrible! I thought of what it would be like to have to hide my prayers from you—my faith in Christ—my hope of heaven. I thought of bringing up the child—how all

that was vital to me would be a superstition to you, which you would bear with for my sake. I thought of death," and she shuddered—"your death, or my death, and how this change in you would cleave a gulf of misery between us. And then I thought of losing my own faith, of denying Christ. It was a nightmare—I saw myself on a long road, escaping with Mary in my arms, escaping from you! Oh, Robert! it wasn't only for myself,"—and she clung to him as though she were a child, confessing, explaining away, some grievous fault hardly to be forgiven. "I was agonised by the thought that I was not my own—I and my child were *Christ's*. Could I risk what was His? Other men and women had died, had given up all for His sake. Is there no one now strong enough to suffer torment, to kill even love itself rather than deny Him—rather than crucify Him afresh?"

She paused, struggling for breath. The terrible excitement of that bygone moment had seized upon her again and communicated itself to him.

"And then—and then," she said sobbing, "I don't know how it was. One moment I was sitting up looking straight before me, without a tear, thinking of what was the least I must do, even—even—if you and I stayed together—of all the hard compacts and conditions I must make—judging you all the while from a long, long distance, and feeling as though I had buried the old self—sacrificed the old heart—for ever! And the next I was lying on the ground crying for you, Robert, crying for you! Your face had come back to me as you lay there in the early morning light. I thought how I had kissed you—how pale and gray and thin you looked. Oh, how I loathed myself! That I should think it could

be God's will that I should leave you, or torture you, my poor husband! I had not only been wicked towards you—I had offended Christ. I could think of nothing as I lay there—again and again—but “*Little children, love one another; little children, love one another.*” Oh, my beloved,”—and she looked up with the solemnest, tenderest smile breaking on the marred tear-stained face,—“I will never give up hope, I will pray for you night and day. God will bring you back. You cannot lose yourself so. No, no! His grace is stronger than our wills. But I will not preach to you—I will not persecute you—I will only live beside you—in your heart—and love you always. Oh, how could I—how could I have such thoughts!”

And again she broke off, weeping, as if to the tender torn heart the only crime that could not be forgiven was its own offence against love. As for him he was beyond speech. If he had ever lost his vision of God, his wife's love would that moment have given it back to him.

“Robert,” she said presently, urged on by the sacred yearning to heal, to atone, “I will not complain—I will not ask you to wait. I take your word for it that it is best not, that it would do no good. The only hope is in time—and prayer. I must suffer, dear, I must be weak sometimes; but oh, I am so sorry for you! Kiss me, forgive me, Robert; I will be your faithful wife unto our lives' end.”

He kissed her, and in that kiss, so sad, so pitiful, so clinging, their new life was born.

CHAPTER XXX.

BUT the problem of these two lives was not solved by a burst of feeling. Without that determining impulse of love and pity in Catherine's heart the salvation of an exquisite bond might indeed have been impossible. But in spite of it the laws of character had still to work themselves inexorably out on either side.

The whole gist of the matter for Elsmere lay really in this question: Hidden in Catherine's nature, was there, or was there not, the true stuff of fanaticism? Madame Guyon left her infant children to the mercies of chance, while she followed the voice of God to the holy war with heresy. Under similar conditions Catherine Elsmere might have planned the same. Could she ever have carried it out?

And yet the question is still ill stated. For the influences of our modern time on religious action are so blunting and dulling, because in truth the religious motive itself is being constantly modified, whether the religious person knows it or not. Is it possible now for a good woman with a heart, in Catherine Elsmere's position, to maintain herself against love, and all those subtle forces to which such a change as Elsmere's opens the house doors, without either hardening, or greatly yielding? Let Catherine's further story give some sort of an answer.

Poor soul! As they sat together in the study, after he had brought her home, Robert, with averted eyes, went through the plans he had already thought into shape. Catherine listened, saying almost nothing. But never, never had she loved this life of theirs so well as now that she was called on, at barely a week's notice, to

give it up for ever! For Robert's scheme, in which her reason fully acquiesced, was to keep to their plan of going to Switzerland, he having first, of course, settled all things with the bishop, and having placed his living in the hands of Mowbray Elsmere. When they left the rectory, in a week or ten days' time, he proposed, in fact, his voice almost inaudible as he did so, that Catherine should leave it for good.

"Everybody had better suppose," he said choking, "that we are coming back. Of course we need say nothing. Armitstead will be here for next week certainly. Then afterwards I can come down and manage everything. I shall get it over in a day if I can, and see nobody. I cannot say good-bye, nor can you."

"And next Sunday, Robert?" she asked him, after a pause.

"I shall write to Armitstead this afternoon and ask him, if he possibly can, to come to-morrow afternoon, instead of Monday, and take the service."

Catherine's hands clasped each other still more closely. So then she had heard her husband's voice for the last time in the public ministry of the Church, in prayer, in exhortation, in benediction! One of the most sacred traditions of her life was struck from her at a blow.

It was long before either of them spoke again. Then she ventured another question.

"And have you any idea of what we shall do next, Robert—of—of our future?"

"Shall we try London for a little?" he answered in a queer strained voice, leaning against the window, and looking out, that he might not see her. "I should find work among the poor—so would you—and I could go

on with my book. And your mother and sister will probably be there part of the winter."

She acquiesced silently. How mean and shrunken a future it seemed to them both, beside the wide and honourable range of his clergyman's life as he and she had developed it. But she did not dwell long on that. Her thoughts were suddenly invaded by the memory of a cottage tragedy in which she had recently taken a prominent part. A girl, a child of fifteen, from one of the crowded Mile End hovels, had gone at Christmas to a distant farm as servant, and come back a month ago, ruined, the victim of an outrage over which Elsmere had ground his teeth in fierce and helpless anger. Catherine had found her a shelter, and was to see her through her "trouble"; the girl, a frail half-witted creature, who could find no words even to bewail herself, clinging to her the while with the dumbest, pitifullest tenacity.

How *could* she leave that girl? It was as if all the fibres of life were being violently wrenched from all their natural connections.

"Robert!" she cried at last with a start. "Had you forgotten the Institute to-morrow?"

"No—no," he said with the saddest smile. "No, I had not forgotten it. Don't go, Catherine—don't go. I must. But why should you go through it?"

"But there are all those flags and wreaths," she said, getting up in pained bewilderment. "I must go and look after them."

He caught her in his arms.

"Oh, my wife, my wife, forgive me!" It was a groan of misery. She put up her hands and pressed his hair back from his temples.

"I love you, Robert," she said simply, her face colourless, but perfectly calm.

Half an hour later, after he had worked through some letters, he went into the workroom and found her surrounded with flags, and a vast litter of paper roses and evergreens, which she and the new agent's daughters who had come up to help her were putting together for the decorations of the morrow. Mary was tottering from chair to chair in high glee, a big pink rose stuck in the belt of her pinafore. His pale wife, trying to smile and talk as usual, her lap full of evergreens, and her politeness exercised by the chatter of the two Miss Batesons, seemed to Robert one of the most pitiful spectacles he had ever seen. He fled from it out into the village driven by a restless longing for change and movement.

Here he found a large gathering round the new Institute. There were carpenters at work on a triumphal arch in front, and close by, an admiring circle of children and old men, huddling in the shade of a great chestnut.

Elsmere spent an hour in the building, helping and superintending, stabbed every now and then by the unsuspecting friendliness of those about him, or worried by their blunt comments on his looks. He could not bear more than a glance into the new rooms apportioned to the Naturalist's Club. There against the wall stood the new glass cases he had wrung out of the squire, with various new collections lying near, ready to be arranged and unpacked when time allowed. The old collections stood out bravely in the added space and light; the walls were hung here and there with a wonderful set of geographical pictures he had carried off from a London

exhibition, and fed his boys on for weeks; the floors were freshly matted; the new pine fittings gave out their pleasant cleanly scent; the white paint of doors and windows shone in the August sun. The building had been given by the squire. The fittings and furniture had been mainly of his providing. What uses he had planned for it all!—only to see the fruits of two years' effort out of doors, and personal frugality at home, handed over to some possibly unsympathetic stranger. The heart beat painfully against the iron bars of fate, rebelling against the power of a mental process so to affect a man's whole practical and social life!

He went out at last by the back of the Institute, where a little bit of garden, spoilt with building materials, led down to a lane.

At the end of the garden, beside the untidy gap in the hedge made by the builders' carts, he saw a man standing, who turned away down the lane, however, as soon as the rector's figure emerged into view.

Robert had recognised the slouching gait and unwieldy form of Henslowe. There were at this moment all kinds of gruesome stories afloat in the village about the ex-agent. It was said that he was breaking up fast; it was known that he was extensively in debt; and the village shopkeepers had already held an agitated meeting or two, to decide upon the best mode of getting their money out of him, and upon a joint plan of cautious action towards his custom in future. The man, indeed, was sinking deeper and deeper into a pit of sordid misery, maintaining all the while a snarling exasperating front to the world, which was rapidly converting the careless half-malicious pity wherewith the village had till now surveyed his fall into that more active species of baiting which

the human animal is never very loth to try upon the limping specimens of his race.

Henslowe stopped and turned as he heard the steps behind him. Six months' self-murdering had left ghastly traces. He was many degrees nearer the brute than he had been even when Robert made his ineffectual visit. But at this actual moment Robert's practised eye—for every English parish clergyman becomes dismally expert in the pathology of drunkenness—saw that there was no fight in him. He was in one of the drunkard's periods of collapse—shivering, flabby, starting at every sound, a misery to himself and a spectacle to others.

"Mr. Henslowe!" cried Robert, still pursuing him, "may I speak to you a moment?"

The ex-agent turned, his prominent bloodshot eyes glowering at the speaker. But he had to catch at his stick for support, or at the nervous shock of Robert's summons his legs would have given way under him.

Robert came up with him and stood a second, fronting the evil silence of the other, his boyish face deeply flushed. Perhaps the grotesqueness of that former scene was in his mind. Moreover, the vestry meetings had furnished Henslowe with periodical opportunities for venting his gall on the rector, and they had never been neglected. But he plunged on boldly.

"I am going away next week, Mr. Henslowe; I shall be away some considerable time. Before I go I should like to ask you whether you do not think the feud between us had better cease. Why will you persist in making an enemy of me? If I did you an injury it was neither wittingly nor willingly. I know you have been ill, and I gather that—that—you are in trouble. If I could stand between you and further mischief I would—

most gladly. If help—or—or money——” He paused. He shrewdly suspected, indeed, from the reports that reached him, that Henslowe was on the brink of bankruptcy.

The rector had spoken with the utmost diffidence and delicacy, but Henslowe found energy in return for an outburst of quavering animosity, from which, however, physical weakness had extracted all its sting.

“I’ll thank you to make your canting offers to some one else, Mr. Elsmere. When I want your advice I’ll ask it. Good day to you.” And he turned away with as much of an attempt at dignity as his shaking limbs would allow of.

“Listen, Mr. Henslowe,” said Robert firmly, walking beside him; “you know—I know—that if this goes on, in a year’s time you will be in your grave, and your poor wife and children struggling to keep themselves from the workhouse. You may think that I have no right to preach to you—that you are the older man—that it is an intrusion. But what is the good of blinking facts that you must know all the world knows? Come, now, Mr. Henslowe, let us behave for a moment as though this were our last meeting. Who knows? the chances of life are many. Lay down your grudge against me, and let me speak to you as one struggling human being to another. The fact that you have, as you say, become less prosperous, in some sort through me, seems to give me a right—to make it a duty for me, if you will—to help you if I can. Let me send a good doctor to see you. Let me implore you as a last chance to put yourself into his hands, and to obey him, and your wife; and let me,”—the rector hesitated,—“let me make things pecuniarily easier for Mrs. Henslowe till you have pulled yourself

out of the hole in which, by common report at least, you are now."

Henslowe stared at him, divided between anger caused by the sore stirring of his old self-importance, and a tumultuous flood of self-pity, roused irresistibly in him by Robert's piercing frankness, and aided by his own more or less maudlin condition. The latter sensation quickly undermined the former; he turned his back on the rector and leant over the railings of the lane, shaken by something it is hardly worth while to dignify by the name of emotion. Robert stood by, a pale embodiment of mingled judgment and compassion. He gave the man a few moments to recover himself, and then, as Henslowe turned round again, he silently and appealingly held out his hand—the hand of the good man, which it was an honour for such as Henslowe to touch. Constrained by the moral force radiating from his look, the other took it with a kind of helpless sullenness.

Then, seizing at once on the slight concession, with that complete lack of inconvenient self-consciousness, or hindering indecision, which was one of the chief causes of his effect on men and women, Robert began to sound the broken repulsive creature as to his affairs. Bit by bit, compelled by a will and nervous strength far superior to his own, Henslowe was led into abrupt and blurted confidences which surprised no one so much as himself. Robert's quick sense possessed itself of point after point, seeing presently ways of escape and relief which the besotted brain beside him had been quite incapable of devising for itself. They walked on into the open country, and what with the discipline of the rector's presence, the sobering effect wrought by the shock to pride and habit, and the unwonted brain exercise of the conversa-

tion, the demon in Henslowe had been for the moment most strangely tamed after half an hour's talk. Actually some reminiscences of his old ways of speech and thought, the ways of the once prosperous and self-reliant man of business, had reappeared in him before the end of it, called out by the subtle influence of a manner which always attracted to the surface whatever decent element there might be left in a man, and then instantly gave it a recognition which was more redeeming than either counsel or denunciation.

By the time they parted Robert had arranged with his old enemy that he should become his surety with a rich cousin in Churton, who, always supposing there were no risk in the matter, and that benevolence ran on all-fours with security of investment, was prepared to shield the credit of the family by the advance of a sufficient sum of money to rescue the ex-agent from his most pressing difficulties. He had also wrung from him the promise to see a specialist in London—Robert writing that evening to make the appointment.

How had it been done? Neither Robert nor Henslowe ever quite knew. Henslowe walked home in a bewilderment which for once had nothing to do with brandy, but was simply the result of a moral shock acting on what was still human in the man's debased consciousness, just as electricity acts on the bodily frame.

Robert, on the other hand, saw him depart with a singular lightening of mood. What he seemed to have achieved might turn out to be the merest moonshine. At any rate, the incident had appeased in him a kind of spiritual hunger—the hunger to escape a while from that incessant process of destructive analysis with which the

mind was still beset, into some use of energy, more positive, human, and beneficent.

The following day was one long trial of endurance for Elsmere and for Catherine. She pleaded to go, promising quietly to keep out of his sight, and they started together—a miserable pair.

Crowds, heat, decorations, the grandees on the platform, and conspicuous among them the squire's slouching frame and striking head, side by side with a white and radiant Lady Helen—the outer success, the inner revolt and pain—and the constant seeking of his truant eyes for a face that hid itself as much as possible in dark corners, but was in truth the one thing sharply present to him—these were the sort of impressions that remained with Elsmere afterwards of this last meeting with his people.

He had made a speech, of which he never could remember a word. As he sat down, there had been a slight flutter of surprise in the sympathetic looks of those about him, as though the tone of it had been somewhat unexpected and disproportionate to the occasion. Had he betrayed himself in any way? He looked for Catherine, but she was nowhere to be seen. Only in his search he caught the squire's ironical glance, and wondered with quick shame what sort of nonsense he had been talking.

Then a neighbouring clergyman, who had been his warm supporter and admirer from the beginning, sprang up and made a rambling panegyric on him and on his work, which Elsmere writhed under. His work! absurdity! What could be done in two years? He saw it all as the merest nothing, a ragged beginning which might do more harm than good.

But the cheering was incessant, the popular feeling

intense. There was old Milsom waving a feeble arm; John Allwood gaunt, but radiant; Mary Sharland, white still as the ribbons on her bonnet, egging on her flushed and cheering husband; and the club boys grinning and shouting, partly for love of Elsmere, mostly because to the young human animal mere noise is heaven. In front was an old hedger and ditcher, who came round the parish periodically, and never failed to take Elsmere's opinion as to "a bit of prapperty" he and two other brothers as ancient as himself had been quarrelling over for twenty years, and were likely to go on quarrelling over, till all three litigants had closed their eyes on a mortal scene which had afforded them on the whole vast entertainment, though little pelf. Next him was a bowed and twisted old tramp who had been shepherd in the district in his youth, had then gone through the Crimea and the Mutiny, and was now living about the commons, welcome to feed here and sleep there for the sake of his stories and his queer innocuous wit. Robert had had many a gay argumentative walk with him, and he and his companion had tramped miles to see the function, to rattle their sticks on the floor in Elsmere's honour, and satiate their curious gaze on the squire.

When all was over, Elsmere, with his wife on his arm, mounted the hill to the rectory, leaving the green behind them still crowded with folk. Once inside the shelter of their own trees, husband and wife turned instinctively and caught each other's hands. A low groan broke from Elsmere's lips; Catherine looked at him one moment, then fell weeping on his breast. The first chapter of their common life was closed.

One thing more, however, of a private nature, re-

mained for Elsmere to do. Late in the afternoon he walked over to the Hall.

He found the squire in the inner library, among his German books, his pipe in his mouth, his old smoking coat and slippers bearing witness to the rapidity and joy with which he had shut the world out again after the futilities of the morning. His mood was more accessible than Elsmere had yet found it since his return.

"Well, have you done with all those tomfooleries, Elsmere? Precious eloquent speech you made! When I see you and people like you throwing yourselves at the heads of the people, I always think of Scaliger's remark about the Basques: 'They say they understand one another—I don't believe a word of it!' All that the lower class *wants* to understand, at any rate, is the shortest way to the pockets of you and me; all that you and I need understand, according to me, is how to keep 'em off! There you have the sum and substance of *my* political philosophy."

"You remind me," said Robert drily, sitting down on one of the library stools, "of some of those sentiments you expressed so forcibly on the first evening of our acquaintance."

The squire received the shaft with equanimity.

"I was not amiable, I remember, on that occasion," he said coolly, his thin, old man's fingers moving the while among the shelves of books, "nor on several subsequent ones. I had been made a fool of, and you were not particularly adroit. But of course you won't acknowledge it. Who ever yet got a parson to confess himself!"

"Strangely enough, Mr. Wendover," said Robert, fixing him with a pair of deliberate feverish eyes, "I am here at this moment for that very purpose—"

"Go on," said the squire, turning, however, to meet the rector's look, his gold spectacles falling forward over his long hooked nose, his attitude one of sudden attention. "Go on."

All his grievances against Elsmere returned to him. He stood aggressively waiting.

Robert paused a moment, and then said abruptly—

"Perhaps even you will agree, Mr. Wendover, that I had some reason for sentiment this morning. Unless I read the lessons to-morrow, which is possible, to-day has been my last public appearance as rector of this parish!"

The squire looked at him dumfounded.

"And your reasons?" he said, with quick imperative-ness.

Robert gave them. He admitted, as plainly and bluntly as he had done to Grey, the squire's own part in the matter; but here a note of antagonism, almost of defiance, crept even into his confession of wide and illimitable defeat. He was there, so to speak, to hand over his sword. But to the squire, his surrender had all the pride of victory.

"Why should you give up your living?" asked the squire after several minutes' complete silence.

He too had sat down, and was now bending forward, his sharp small eyes peering at his companion.

"Simply because I prefer to feel myself an honest man. However, I have not acted without advice. Grey of St. Anselm's—you know him of course—was a very close personal friend of mine at Oxford. I have been to see him, and we agreed it was the only thing to do."

"Oh, Grey," exclaimed the squire, with a movement of impatience. "Grey of course wanted you to set up a church of your own, or to join his! He is like all idealists,

he has the usual foolish contempt for the compromise of institutions."

"Not at all," said Robert calmly, "you are mistaken; he has the most sacred respect for institutions. He only thinks it well, and I agree with him, that with regard to a man's public profession and practice he should recognise that two and two make four."

It was clear to him from the squire's tone and manner that Mr. Wendover's instincts on the point were very much what he had expected, the instincts of the philosophical man of the world, who scorns the notion of taking popular beliefs seriously, whether for protest or for sympathy. But he was too weary to argue. The squire, however, rose hastily and began to walk up and down in a gathering storm of irritation. The triumph gained for his own side, the tribute to his life's work, were at the moment absolutely indifferent to him. They were effaced by something else much harder to analyse. Whatever it was, it drove him to throw himself upon Robert's position with a perverse bewildering bitterness.

"Why should you break up your life in this wanton way? Who, in God's name, is injured if you keep your living? It is the business of the thinker and the scholar to clear his mind of cobwebs. Granted. You have done it. But it is also the business of the practical man to live! If I had your altruist emotional temperament, I should not hesitate for a moment. I should regard the historical expressions of an eternal tendency in men as wholly indifferent to me. If I understand you aright, you have flung away the sanctions of orthodoxy. There is no other in the way. Treat words as they deserve. *You*"—and the speaker laid an emphasis on the pronoun which for the life of him he could not help making

sarcastic — “*you* will always have Gospel enough to preach.”

“I cannot,” Robert repeated quietly, unmoved by the taunt, if it was one. “I am in a different stage, I imagine, from you. Words — that is to say, the specific Christian formulæ — may be indifferent to you, though a month or two ago I should hardly have guessed it; they are just now anything but indifferent to me.”

The squire’s brow grew darker. He took up the argument again, more pugnaciously than ever. It was the strangest attempt ever made to gibe and flout a wandering sheep back into the fold. Robert’s resentment was roused at last. The squire’s temper seemed to him totally inexplicable, his arguments contradictory, the conversation useless and irritating. He got up to take his leave.

“What you are about to do, Elsmere,” the squire wound up with saturnine emphasis, “is a piece of *cowardice*! You will live bitterly to regret the haste and the unreason of it.”

“There has been no haste,” exclaimed Robert in the low tone of passionate emotion; “I have not rooted up the most sacred growths of life as a careless child devastates its garden. There are some things which a man only does because he *must*.”

There was a pause. Robert held out his hand. The squire would hardly touch it. Outwardly his mood was one of the strangest eccentricity and anger; and as to what was beneath it, Elsmere’s quick divination was dulled by worry and fatigue. It only served him so far that at the door he turned back, hat in hand, and said, looking lingeringly the while at the solitary sombre figure,

at the great library, with all its suggestive and exquisite detail: "If Monday is fine, Squire, will you walk?"

The squire made no reply except by another question.

"Do you still keep to your Swiss plans for next week?" he asked sharply.

"Certainly. The plan, as it happens, is a Godsend. But there," said Robert, with a sigh, "let me explain the details of this dismal business to you on Monday. I have hardly the courage for it now."

The curtain dropped behind him. Mr. Wendover stood a minute looking after him; then, with some vehement expletive or other, walked up to his writing-table, drew some folios that were lying on it towards him, with hasty maladroit movements which sent his papers flying over the floor, and plunged doggedly into work.

He and Mrs. Darcy dined alone. After dinner the squire leant against the mantelpiece sipping his coffee, more gloomily silent than even his sister had seen him for weeks. And, as always happened when he became more difficult and morose, she became more childish. She was now wholly absorbed with a little electric toy she had just bought for Mary Elsmere, a number of infinitesimal little figures dancing fantastically under the stimulus of an electric current, generated by the simplest means. She hung over it absorbed, calling to her brother every now and then, as though by sheer perversity, to come and look whenever the pink or the blue *danseuse* executed a more surprising somersault than usual.

He took not the smallest spoken notice of her, though his eyes followed her contemptuously as she moved from

window to window with her toy in pursuit of the fading light.

"Oh, Roger," she called presently, still throwing herself to this side and that, to catch new views of her pith puppets, "I have got something to show you. You must admire them—you shall! I have been drawing them all day, and they are nearly done. You remember what I told you once about my 'imps'? I have seen them all my life, since I was a child in France with papa, and I have never been able to draw them till the last few weeks. They are such dears—such darlings; every one will know them when he sees them! There is the Chinese imp, the low smirking creature, you know, that sits on the edge of your cup of tea; there is the flipperty-flopperty creature that flies out at you when you open a drawer; there is the twisty-twirly person that sits jeering on the edge of your hat when it blows away from you; and"—her voice dropped—"that *ugly, ugly* thing I always see waiting for me on the top of a gate. They have teased me all my life, and now at *last* I have drawn them. If they were to take offence to-morrow I should have them—the beauties—all safe."

She came towards him, her *bizarre* little figure swaying from side to side, her eyes glittering, her restless hands pulling at the lace round her blanched head and face. The squire, his hands behind him, looked at her frowning, an involuntary horror dawning on his dark countenance, turned abruptly, and left the room.

Mr. Wendover worked till midnight; then, tired out, he turned to the bit of fire to which, in spite of the op-

pressiveness of the weather, the chilliness of age and nervous strain had led him to set alight. He sat there for long, sunk in the blackest reverie. He was the only living creature in the great library wing which spread around and above him—the only waking creature in the whole vast pile of Murewell. The silver lamps shone with a steady melancholy light on the chequered walls of books. The silence was a silence that could be felt; and the gleaming Artemis, the tortured frowning Medusa, were hardly stiller in their frozen calm than the crouching figure of the squire.

So Elsmere was going! In a few weeks the rectory would be once more tenanted by one of those nonentities the squire had either patronised or scorned all his life. The park, the lanes, the room in which he sits, will know that spare young figure, that animated voice, no more. The outlet which had brought so much relief and stimulus to his own mental powers is closed; the friendship on which he had unconsciously come to depend so much is broken before it had well begun.

All sorts of strange thwarted instincts make themselves felt in the squire. The wife he had once thought to marry, the children he might have had, come to sit like ghosts with him beside the fire. He had never, like Augustine, "loved to love"; he had only loved to know. But none of us escapes to the last the yearnings which make us men. The squire becomes conscious that certain fibres he had thought long since dead in him had been all the while twining themselves silently round the disciple who had shown him in many respects such a filial consideration and confidence. That young man might have become to him the son of his old age, the

one human being from whom, as weakness of mind and body break him down, even his indomitable spirit might have accepted the sweetness of human pity, the comfort of human help.

And it is his own hand which has done most to break the nascent slowly-forming tie. He has bereft himself.

With what incredible recklessness had he been acting all these months!

It was the *levity* of his own proceeding which stared him in the face. His rough hand had closed on the delicate wings of a soul as a boy crushes the butterfly he pursues. As Elsmere had stood looking back at him from the library door, the suffering which spoke in every line of that changed face had stirred a sudden troubled remorse in Roger Wendover. It was mere justice that one result of that suffering should be to leave himself forlorn.

He had been thinking and writing of religion, of the history of ideas, all his life. Had he ever yet grasped the meaning of religion *to the religious man?* *God* and *faith*—what have these venerable ideas ever mattered to him personally, except as the subjects of the most ingenious analysis, the most delicate historical inductions? Not only sceptical to the core, but constitutionally indifferent, the squire had always found enough to make life amply worth living in the mere dissection of other men's beliefs.

But to-night! The unexpected shock of feeling, mingled with the terrible sense, periodically alive in him, of physical doom, seems to have stripped from the thorny soul its outer defences of mental habit. He sees once

more the hideous spectacle of his father's death, his own black half-remembered moments of warning, the teasing horror of his sister's increasing weakness of brain. Life has been on the whole a burden, though there has been a certain joy no doubt in the fierce intellectual struggle of it. And to-night it seems so nearly over! A cold prescience of death creeps over the squire as he sits in the lamplit silence. His eye seems to be actually penetrating the eternal vastness which lies about our life. He feels himself old, feeble, alone. The awe, the terror which are at the root of all religions have fallen even upon him at last.

The fire burns lower, the night wears on; outside, an airless, misty moonlight lies over park and field. Hark! was that a sound upstairs, in one of those silent empty rooms?

The squire half rises, one hand on his chair, his blanched face strained, listening. Again! Is it a footstep or simply a delusion of the ear? He rises, pushes aside the curtains into the inner library, where the lamps have almost burnt away, creeps up the wooden stair, and into the deserted upper story.

Why was that door into the end room—his father's room—open? He had seen it closed that afternoon. No one had been there since. He stepped nearer. Was that simply a gleam of moonlight on the polished floor—confused lines of shadow thrown by the vine outside? And was that sound nothing but the stirring of the rising wind of dawn against the open casement window? Or——

“My God!”

The squire fled downstairs. He gained his chair again. He sat upright an instant, impressing on himself,

with sardonic vindictive force, some of those truisms as to the action of mind on body, of brain-process on sensation, which it had been part of his life's work to illustrate. The philosopher had time to realise a shuddering fellowship of weakness with his kind, to see himself as a helpless instance of an inexorable law, before he fell back in his chair; a swoon, born of pitiful human terror—terror of things unseen—creeping over heart and brain.

BOOK V.

ROSE.

CHAPTER XXXI.

It was a November afternoon. London lay wrapped in rainy fog. The atmosphere was such as only a Londoner can breathe with equanimity, and the gloom was indescribable.

Meanwhile, in defiance of the Inferno outside, festal preparations were being made in a little house on Campden Hill. Lamps were lit; in the drawing-room chairs were pushed back; the piano was open, and a violin stand towered beside it; chrysanthemums were everywhere; an invalid lady in a "best cap" occupied the sofa; and two girls were flitting about, clearly making the last arrangements necessary for a "musical afternoon."

The invalid was Mrs. Leyburn, the girls, of course, Rose and Agnes. Rose at last was safely settled in her longed-for London, and an artistic company, of the sort her soul loved, was coming to tea with her.

Of Rose's summer at Burwood very little need be said. She was conscious that she had not borne it very well. She had been off-hand with Mrs. Thornburgh, and

had enjoyed one or two open skirmishes with Mrs. Seaton. Her whole temper had been irritating and irritable—she was perfectly aware of it. Towards her sick mother, indeed, she had controlled herself; nor, for such a restless creature, had she made a bad nurse. But Agnes had endured much, and found it all the harder because she was so totally in the dark as to the whys and wherefores of her sister's moods.

Rose herself would have scornfully denied that any whys and wherefores—beyond her rooted dislike of Whindale—existed. Since her return from Berlin, and especially since that moment when, as she was certain, Mr. Langham had avoided her and Catherine at the National Gallery, she had been calmly certain of her own heart-wholeness. Berlin had developed her precisely as she had desired that it might. The necessities of the Bohemian student's life had trained her to a new independence and shrewdness, and in her own opinion she was now a woman of the world judging all things by pure reason.

Oh, of course, she understood him perfectly. In the first place, at the time of their first meeting she had been a mere bread-and-butter miss, the easiest of preys for any one who might wish to get a few hours' amusement and distraction out of her temper and caprices. In the next place, even supposing he had been ever inclined to fall in love with her, which her new sardonic fairness of mind obliged her to regard as entirely doubtful, he was a man to whom marriage was impossible. How could any one expect such a superfine dreamer to turn breadwinner for a wife and household? Imagine Mr. Langham interviewed by a rate-collector or troubled about coals!

As to her—simply—she had misunderstood the laws of the game. It was a little bitter to have to confess it; a little bitter that he should have seen it, and have felt reluctantly compelled to recall the facts to her. But, after all, most girls have some young follies to blush over.

So far the little cynic would get, becoming rather more scarlet, however, over the process of reflection than was quite compatible with the ostentatious worldly wisdom of it. Then a sudden inward restlessness would break through, and she would spend a passionate hour pacing up and down, and hungering for the moment when she might avenge upon herself and him the week of silly friendship he had found it necessary as her elder and monitor to cut short!

In September came the news of Robert's resignation of his living. Mother and daughters sat looking at each other over the letter, stupefied. That this calamity, of all others, should have fallen on Catherine, of all women! Rose said very little, and presently jumped up with shining excited eyes, and ran out for a walk with Bob, leaving Agnes to console their tearful and agitated mother. When she came in she went singing about the house as usual. Agnes, who was moved by the news out of all her ordinary *sangfroid*, was outraged by what seemed to her Rose's callousness. *She* wrote a letter to Catherine, which Catherine put among her treasures, so strangely unlike it was to the quiet indifferent Agnes of every day. Rose spent a morning over an attempt at a letter, which when it reached its destination only wounded Catherine by its constraint and convention.

And yet that same night when the child was alone, suddenly some phrase of Catherine's letter recurred to

her. She *saw*, as only imaginative people see, with every detail visualised, her sister's suffering, her sister's struggle that was to be. She jumped into bed, and, stifling all sounds under the clothes, cried herself to sleep, which did not prevent her next morning from harbouring somewhere at the bottom of her, a wicked and furtive satisfaction that Catherine might now learn there were more opinions in the world than one.

As for the rest of the valley, Mrs. Leyburn soon passed from bewailing to a plaintive indignation with Robert, which was a relief to her daughters. It seemed to her a reflection on "Richard" that Robert should have behaved so. Church opinions had been good enough for "Richard." "The young men seem to think, my dears, their fathers were all fools!"

The vicar, good man, was sincerely distressed, but sincerely confident, also, that in time Elsmere would find his way back into the fold. In Mrs. Thornburgh's dismay there was a secret superstitious pang. Perhaps she had better not have meddled. Perhaps it was never well to meddle. One event bears many readings, and the tragedy of Catherine Elsmere's life took shape in the uneasy consciousness of the vicar's spouse as a more or less sharp admonition against wilfulness in match-making.

Of course Rose had her way as to wintering in London. They came up in the middle of October while the Elsmeres were still abroad, and settled into a small house in Lerwick Gardens, Campden Hill, which Catherine had secured for them on her way through town to the Continent.

As soon as Mrs. Leyburn had been made comfortable,

Rose set to work to look up her friends. She owed her acquaintance in London hitherto mainly to Mr. and Mrs. Pierson, the young barrister and his æsthetic wife whom she had originally met and made friends with in a railway-carriage. Mr. Pierson was bustling and shrewd; not made of the finest clay, yet not at all a bad fellow. His wife, the daughter of a famous Mrs. Leo Hunter of a bygone generation, was small, untidy, and in all matters of religious or political opinion "emancipated" to an extreme. She had also a strong vein of inherited social ambition, and she and her husband welcomed Rose with greater effusion than ever, in proportion as she was more beautiful and more indisputably gifted than ever. They placed themselves and their house at the girl's service, partly out of genuine admiration and good-nature, partly also because they divined in her a profitable social appendage.

For the Piersons, socially, were still climbing, and had by no means attained. Their world, so far, consisted too much of the odds and ends of most other worlds. They were not satisfied with it, and the friendship of the girl-violinist, whose vivacious beauty and artistic gift made a stir wherever she went, was a very welcome addition to their resources. They fêted her in their own house; they took her to the houses of other people; society smiled on Miss Leyburn's protectors more than it had ever smiled on Mr. and Mrs. Pierson taken alone; and meanwhile Rose, flushed, excited, and totally unsuspecting, thought the world a fairy tale, and lived from morning till night in a perpetual din of music, compliments, and bravos, which seemed to her life indeed—life at last!

With the beginning of November the Elsmeres returned, and about the same time Rose began to project tea-parties of her own, to which Mrs. Leyburn gave a flurried assent. When the invitations were written, Rose sat staring at them a little, pen in hand.

"I wonder what Catherine will say to some of these people!" she remarked in a dubious voice to Agnes. "Some of them are queer, I admit; but, after all, those two superior persons will have to get used to my friends some time, and they may as well begin."

"You cannot expect poor Cathie to come," said Agnes with sudden energy.

Rose's eyebrows went up. Agnes resented her ironical expression, and with a word or two of quite unusual sharpness got up and went.

Rose, left alone, sprang up suddenly, and clasped her white fingers above her head, with a long breath.

"Where my heart used to be there is now just—a black—cold—cinder," she remarked with sarcastic emphasis. "I am sure I used to be a nice girl once, but it is so long ago I can't remember it!"

She stayed so a minute or more; then two tears suddenly broke and fell. She dashed them angrily away, and sat down again to her note-writing.

Amongst the cards she had still to fill up was one of which the envelope was addressed to the Hon. Hugh Flaxman, 90 St. James's Place. Lady Charlotte, though she had afterwards again left town, had been in Martin Street at the end of October. The Leyburns had lunched there, and had been introduced by her to her nephew, and Lady Helen's brother, Mr. Flaxman. The girls had found him agreeable; he had called the week afterwards

when they were not at home; and Rose now carelessly sent him a card, with the inward reflection that he was much too great a man to come, and was probably enjoying himself at country houses, as every aristocrat should, in November.

The following day the two girls made their way over to Bedford Square, where the Elsmeres had taken a house in order to be near the British Museum. They pushed their way upstairs through a medley of packing-cases, and a sickening smell of paint. There was a sound of an opening door, and a gentleman stepped out of the back room, which was to be Elsmere's study, on to the landing.

It was Edward Langham. He and Rose stood and stared at each other a moment. Then Rose in the coolest, lightest voice introduced him to Agnes. Agnes, with one curious glance, took in her sister's defiant smiling ease and the stranger's embarrassment; then she went on to find Catherine. The two left behind exchanged a few *banal* questions and answers. Langham had only allowed himself one look at the dazzling face and eyes framed in fur cap and boa. Afterwards he stood making a study of the ground, and answering her remarks in his usual stumbling fashion. What was it had gone out of her voice—simply the soft callow sounds of first youth? And what a personage she had grown in these twelve months—how formidably, consciously brilliant in look and dress and manner!

Yes, he was still in town—settled there, indeed, for some time. And she—was there any special day on which Mrs. Leyburn received visitors? He asked the question, of course with various hesitations and circumlocutions.

"Oh dear, yes! Will you come next Wednesday, for instance, and inspect a musical menagerie? The animals will go through their performances from four till seven. And I can answer for it that some of the specimens will be entirely new to you."

The prospect offered could hardly have been more repellent to him, but he got out an acceptance somehow. She nodded lightly to him and passed on, and he went downstairs, his head in a whirl. Where had the crude pretty child of yester-year departed to—impulsive, conceited, readily offended, easily touched, sensitive as to what all the world might think of her and her performances? The girl he had just left had counted all her resources, tried the edge of all her weapons, and knew her own place too well to ask for anybody else's appraisal. What beauty—good heavens!—what *aplomb*! The rich husband Elsmere talked of would hardly take much waiting for.

So cogitating, Langham took his way westward to his Beaumont Street rooms. They were on the second floor, small, dingy, choked with books. Ordinarily he shut the door behind him with a sigh of content. This evening they seemed to him intolerably confined and stuffy. He thought of going out to his club and a concert, but did nothing, after all, but sit brooding over the fire till midnight, alternately hugging and hating his solitude.

And so we return to the Wednesday following this unexpected meeting.

The drawing-room at No. 27 was beginning to fill. Rose stood at the door receiving the guests as they flowed in, while Agnes in the background dispensed tea. She

was discussing with herself the probability of Langham's appearance. "Whom shall I introduce him to first?" she pondered, while she shook hands. "The poet? I see mamma is now struggling with him. The 'cellist with the hair—or the lady in Greek dress—or the esoteric Buddhist? What a fascinating selection? I had really no notion we should be quite so curious!"

"Mees Rose, they wait for you," said a charming golden-bearded young German, viola in hand, bowing before her. He and his kind were most of them in love with her already, and all the more so because she knew so well how to keep them at a distance.

She went off, beckoning to Agnes to take her place, and the quartette began. The young German aforesaid played the viola, while the 'cello was divinely played by a Hungarian, of whose outer man it need only be said that in wild profusion of much-tortured hair, in Hebraism of feature, and swarthy smoothness of cheek, he belonged to that type which Nature would seem to have already used to excess in the production of the continental musician. Rose herself was violinist, and the instruments dashed into the opening allegro with a precision and an *entrain* that took the room by storm.

In the middle of it, Langham pushed his way into the crowd round the drawing-room door. Through the heads about him, he could see her standing a little in advance of the others, her head turned to one side, really in the natural attitude of violin-playing, but, as it seemed to him, in a kind of ravishment of listening—cheeks flushed, eyes shining, and the right arm and high-curved wrist managing the bow with a grace born of knowledge and fine training.

"Very much improved, eh?" said an English professional to a German neighbour, lifting his eyebrows interrogatively.

The other nodded with the business-like air of one who knows. "Joachim, they say, *war darüber entzückt*, and did his best vid her, and now D—— has got her"—naming a famous violinist—"she vill make fast brogress. He vill schtamp upon her treecks!"

"But will she ever be more than a very clever amateur? Too pretty, eh?" And the questioner nudged his companion, dropping his voice.

Langham would have given worlds to get on into the room, over the prostrate body of the speaker by preference, but the laws of mass and weight had him at their mercy, and he was rooted to the spot.

The other shrugged his shoulders. "Vell, vid a bretty woman—*überhaupt*—it *dosn't* mean business! It's zoziety—the dukes and the duchesses—that ruins all the yong talents."

This whispered conversation went on during the *andante*. With the *scherzo* the two hirsute faces broke into broad smiles. The artist behind each woke up, and Langham heard no more, except guttural sounds of delight and quick notes of technical criticism.

How that *Scherzo* danced and coquetted, and how the *Presto* flew as though all the winds were behind it, chasing its mad eddies of notes through listening space! At the end, amid a wild storm of applause, she laid down her violin, and, proudly smiling, her breast still heaving with excitement and exertion, received the praises of those crowding round her. The group round the door was precipitated forward, and Langham with it. She

saw him in a moment. Her white brow contracted, and she gave him a quick but hardly smiling glance of recognition through the crowd. He thought there was no chance of getting at her, and moved aside amid the general hubbub to look at a picture.

"Mr. Langham, how do you do?"

He turned sharply and found her beside him. She had come to him with malice in her heart—malice born of smart and long smouldering pain; but as she caught his look, the look of the nervous short-sighted scholar and recluse, as her glance swept over the delicate refinement of the face, a sudden softness quivered in her own. The game was so defenceless!

"You will find nobody here you know," she said abruptly, a little under her breath. "I am morally certain you never saw a single person in the room before! Shall I introduce you?"

"Delighted, of course. But don't disturb yourself about me, Miss Leyburn. I come out of my hole so seldom, everything amuses me—but especially looking and listening."

"Which means," she said, with frank audacity, "that you dislike new people!"

His eye kindled at once. "Say rather that it means a preference for the people that are not new! There is such a thing as concentrating one's attention. I came to hear you play, Miss Leyburn!"

"Well?"

She glanced at him from under her long lashes, one hand playing with the rings on the other. He thought, suddenly, with a sting of regret, of the confiding child

who had flushed under his praise that Sunday evening at Murewell.

"Superb!" he said, but half-mechanically. "I had no notion a winter's work would have done so much for you. Was Berlin as stimulating as you expected? When I heard you had gone, I said to myself—'Well, at least, now, there is one completely happy person in Europe!'"

"Did you? How easily we all dogmatise about each other?" she said scornfully. Her manner was by no means simple. He did not feel himself at all at ease with her. His very embarrassment, however, drove him into rashness, as often happens.

"I thought I had enough to go upon!" he said in another tone; and his black eyes, sparkling as though a film had dropped from them, supplied the reference his words forbore.

She turned away from him with a perceptible drawing up of the whole figure.

"Will you come and be introduced?" she asked him coldly. He bowed as coldly and followed her. Whole-some resentment of her manner was denied him. He *had* asked for her friendship, and had then gone away and forgotten her. Clearly what she meant him to see now was that they were strangers again. Well, she was amply in her right. He suspected that his allusion to their first talk over the fire had not been unwelcome to her, as an opportunity.

And he had actually debated whether he should come, lest in spite of himself she might beguile him once more into those old lapses of will and common sense! Coxcomb!

He made a few spasmodic efforts at conversation with the lady to whom she had introduced him, then awk-

wardly disengaged himself and went to stand in a corner and study his neighbours.

Close to him, he found, was the poet of the party, got up in the most correct professional costume—long hair, velvet coat, eyeglass and all. His extravagance, however, was of the most conventional type. Only his vanity had a touch of the sublime. Langham, who possessed a sort of fine-ear gift for catching conversation, heard him saying to an open-eyed *ingénue* beside him,—

“Oh, my literary baggage is small as yet. I have only done, perhaps, three things that will live.”

“Oh, Mr. Wood!” said the maiden, mildly protesting against so much modesty.

He smiled, thrusting his hand into the breast of the velvet coat. “But then,” he said, in a tone of the purest candour, “at my age I don’t think Shelley had done more!”

Langham, who, like all shy men, was liable to occasional explosions, was seized with a convulsive fit of coughing, and had to retire from the neighbourhood of the bard, who looked round him, disturbed and slightly frowning.

At last he discovered a point of view in the back room whence he could watch the humours of the crowd without coming too closely in contact with them. What a miscellaneous collection it was! He began to be irritably jealous for Rose’s place in the world. She ought to be more adequately surrounded than this. What was Mrs. Leyburn—what were the Elsmeres about? He rebelled against the thought of her living perpetually among her inferiors, the centre of a vulgar publicity, queen of the second-rate.

It provoked him that she should be amusing herself so well. Her laughter, every now and then, came ringing into the back room. And presently there was a general hubbub. Langham craned his neck forward, and saw a struggle going on over a roll of music, between Rose and the long-haired, long-nosed violoncellist. Evidently she did not want to play some particular piece, and wished to put it out of sight. Whereupon the Hungarian, who had been clamouring for it, rushed to its rescue, and there was a mock fight over it. At last, amid the applause of the room, Rose was beaten, and her conqueror, flourishing the music on high, executed a kind of *pas seul* of triumph.

"*Victoria!*" he cried. "Now denn for de conditions of peace. Mees Rose, vill you kindly tune up? You are as moch beaten as the French at Sedan."

"Not a stone of my fortresses, not an inch of my territory!" said Rose, with fine emphasis, crossing her white wrists before her.

The Hungarian looked at her, the wild poetic strain in him which was the strain of race asserting itself.

"But if de victor bows," he said, dropping on one knee before her. "If force lay down his spoils at de feet of beauty?"

The circle round them applauded hotly, the touch of theatricality finding immediate response. Langham was remorselessly conscious of the man's absurd *chevelure* and ill-fitting clothes. But Rose herself had evidently nothing but relish for the scene. Proudly smiling, she held out her hand for her property, and as soon as she had it safe, she whisked it into the open drawer of a cabinet standing near, and drawing out the key, held it up a

moment in her taper fingers, and then, depositing it in a little velvet bag hanging at her girdle, she closed the snap upon it with a little vindictive wave of triumph. Every movement was graceful, rapid, effective.

Half a dozen German throats broke into guttural protest. Amid the storm of laughter and remonstrance, the door suddenly opened. The fluttered parlour-maid mumbled a long name, and, with a port of soldierly uprightness, there advanced behind her a large fair-haired woman, followed by a gentleman, and in the distance by another figure.

Rose drew back a moment astounded, one hand on the piano, her dress sweeping round her. An awkward silence fell on the chattering circle of musicians.

"Good heavens!" said Langham to himself, "Lady Charlotte Wynnstay!"

"How do you do, Miss Leyburn?" said one of the most piercing of voices. "Are you surprised to see me? You didn't ask me—perhaps you don't want me. But I have come, you see, partly because my nephew was coming," and she pointed to the gentleman behind her, "partly because I meant to punish you for not having come to see me last Thursday. Why didn't you?"

"Because we thought you were still away," said Rose, who had by this time recovered her self-possession. "But if you meant to punish me, Lady Charlotte, you have done it badly. I am delighted to see you. May I introduce my sister? Agnes, will you find Lady Charlotte Wynnstay a chair by mamma?"

"Oh, you wish, I see, to dispose of me at once," said the other imperturbably. "What is happening? Is it music?"

"Aunt Charlotte, that is most disingenuous on your part. I gave you ample warning."

Rose turned a smiling face towards the speaker. It was Mr. Flaxman, Lady Charlotte's companion.

"You need not have drawn the picture too black, Mr. Flaxman. There is an escape. If Lady Charlotte will only let my sister take her into the next room, she will find herself well out of the clutches of the music. Oh, Robert! Here you are at last! Lady Charlotte, you remember my brother-in-law? Robert, will you get Lady Charlotte some tea?"

"*I* am not going to be banished," said Mr. Flaxman, looking down upon her, his well-bred, slightly worn face aglow with animation and pleasure.

"Then you will be deafened," said Rose, laughing, as she escaped from him a moment, to arrange for a song from a tall formidable maiden, built after the fashion of Mr. Gilbert's contralto heroines, with a voice which bore out the ample promise of her frame.

"Your sister is a terribly self-possessed young person, Mr. Elsmere," said Lady Charlotte, as Robert piloted her across the room.

"Does that imply praise or blame on your part, Lady Charlotte?" asked Robert, smiling.

"Neither at present. I don't know Miss Leyburn well enough. I merely state a fact. No tea, Mr. Elsmere. I have had three teas already, and I am not like the American woman who could always worry down another cup."

She was introduced to Mrs. Leyburn; but the plaintive invalid was immediately seized with terror of her voice and appearance, and was infinitely grateful to

Robert for removing her as promptly as possible to a chair on the border of the two rooms where she could talk or listen as she pleased. For a few moments she listened to Fräulein Adelmann's veiled unmanageable contralto; then she turned magisterially to Robert standing behind her.

"The art of singing has gone out," she declared, "since the Germans have been allowed to meddle in it. By the way, Mr. Elsmere, how do you manage to be here? Are you taking a holiday?"

Robert looked at her with a start.

"I have left Murewell, Lady Charlotte."

"Left Murewell!" she said in astonishment, turning round to look at him, her eyeglass in her eye. "Why has Helen told me nothing about it? Have you got another living?"

"No. My wife and I are settling in London. We only told Lady Helen of our intentions a few weeks ago."

To which it may be added that Lady Helen, touched and dismayed by Elsmere's letter to her, had not been very eager to hand over the woes of her friends to her aunt's cool and irresponsible comments.

Lady Charlotte deliberately looked at him a minute longer through her glass. Then she let it fall.

"You don't mean to tell me any more, I can see, Mr. Elsmere. But you will allow me to be astonished?"

"Certainly," he said, smiling sadly, and immediately afterwards relapsing into silence.

"Have you heard of the squire lately?" he asked her after a pause.

"Not from him. We are excellent friends when we meet, but he doesn't consider me worth writing to. His

sister—little idiot—writes to me every now and then. But she has not vouchsafed me a letter since the summer. I should say from the last accounts that he was breaking."

"He had a mysterious attack of illness just before I left," said Robert gravely. "It made one anxious."

"Oh, it is the old story. All the Wendovers have died of weak hearts or queer brains—generally of both together. I imagine you had some experience of the squire's queerness at one time, Mr. Elsmere. I can't say you and he seemed to be on particularly good terms on the only occasion I ever had the pleasure of meeting you at Murewell."

She looked up at him, smiling grimly. She had a curiously exact memory for the unpleasant scenes of life.

"Oh, you remember that unlucky evening!" said Robert, reddening a little. "We soon got over that. We became great friends."

Again, however, Lady Charlotte was struck by the quiet melancholy of his tone. How strangely the look of youth—which had been so attractive in him the year before—had ebbed from the man's face—from complexion, eyes, expression! She stared at him, full of a brusque tormenting curiosity as to the how and why.

"I hope there is some one among you strong enough to manage Miss Rose," she said presently, with an abrupt change of subject. "That little sister-in-law of yours is going to be the rage."

"Heaven forbid!" cried Robert fervently.

"Heaven will do nothing of the kind. She is twice as pretty as she was last year; I am told she plays twice as well. She had always the sort of manner that pro-

voked people one moment and charmed them the next. And, to judge by my few words with her just now, I should say she had developed it finely. Well, now, Mr. Elsmere, who is going to take care of her?"

"I suppose we shall all have a try at it, Lady Charlotte."

"Her mother doesn't look to me a person of nerve enough," said Lady Charlotte coolly. "She is a girl certain—absolutely certain—to have adventures, and you may as well be prepared for them."

"I can only trust she will disappoint your expectations, Lady Charlotte," said Robert, with a slightly sarcastic emphasis.

"Elsmere, who is that man talking to Miss Leyburn?" asked Langham as the two friends stood side by side, a little later, watching the spectacle.

"A certain Mr. Flaxman, brother to a pretty little neighbour of ours in Surrey—Lady Helen Varley—and nephew to Lady Charlotte. I have not seen him here before; but I think the girls like him."

"Is he the Flaxman who got the mathematical prize at Berlin last year?"

"Yes, I believe so. A striking person altogether. He is enormously rich, Lady Helen tells me, in spite of an elder brother. All the money in his mother's family has come to him, and he is the heir to Lord Daniel's great Derbyshire property. Twelve years ago I used to hear him talked about incessantly by the Cambridge men one met. 'Citizen Flaxman' they called him, for his opinions' sake. He would ask his scout to dinner, and insist on dining with his own servants, and shaking hands with his friends' butlers. The scouts and the butlers put an end

to that, and altogether, I imagine, the world disappointed him. He has a story, poor fellow, too—a young wife, who died with her first baby ten years ago. The world supposes him never to have got over it, which makes him all the more interesting. A distinguished face, don't you think?—the good type of English aristocrat.”

Langham assented. But his attention was fixed on the group in which Rose's bright hair was conspicuous; and when Robert left him and went to amuse Mrs. Leyburn, he still stood rooted to the same spot watching. Rose was leaning against the piano, one hand behind her, her whole attitude full of a young, easy, self-confident grace. Mr. Flaxman was standing beside her, and they were deep in talk—serious talk apparently, to judge by her quiet manner and the charmed attentive interest of his look. Occasionally, however, there was a sally on her part, and an answering flash of laughter on his; but the stream of conversation closed immediately over the interruption, and flowed on as evenly as before.

Unconsciously Langham retreated farther and farther into the comparative darkness of the inner room. He felt himself singularly insignificant and out of place, and he made no more efforts to talk. Rose played a violin solo, and played it with astonishing delicacy and fire. When it was over Langham saw her turn from the applauding circle crowding in upon her and throw a smiling interrogative look over her shoulder at Mr. Flaxman. Mr. Flaxman bent over her, and as he spoke Langham caught her flush, and the excited sparkle of her eyes. Was this the “some one in the stream”? No doubt!—no doubt!

When the party broke up Langham found himself

borne towards the outer room, and before he knew where he was going he was standing beside her.

"Are *you* here still?" she said to him, startled, as he held out his hand. He replied by some comments on the music, a little lumbering and infelicitous, as all his small-talk was. She hardly listened, but presently she looked up nervously, compelled as it were by the great melancholy eyes above her.

"We are not always in this turmoil, Mr. Langham. Perhaps some other day you will come and make friends with my mother?"

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PRINTING OFFICE OF THE PUBLISHER.

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P.o.angl. 464 Is-2

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